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#21

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS interVIEW

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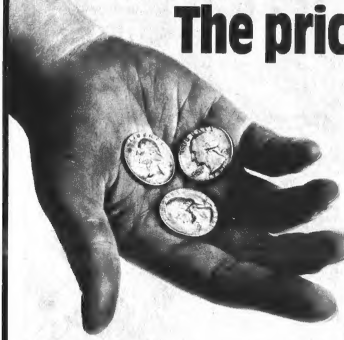

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MIKE SAENZ

Art: Jim Salicrup

UP FRONT

Computers. The very word strikes fear into the hearts of otherwise sane folks. The technology is new — but the story is as old as the human race: Fear of Change. It's a very emotional reaction . . . perhaps you've felt it, yourself.

I know that I have.

For the past few years, while fellow writers were extolling the merits of word processing and personal computers, I prided myself on taking a firm stand — I was adamantly against 'em. I swore they'd pry my cold, dead fingers from my battered 15-year-old manual typewriter.

As you may have guessed by now, this editorial is being composed on a computer.

And from the way I've been carrying on about how wonderful it is to work with a computer — how, in fact, it's not really like working at all, but more like having fun — they could practically put me on television as a spokesman for the cause. There are none so fervent, I suppose, as the converted.

Now the wave of the future has come to comic-book art, too, and there will no doubt be some who react violently against the idea, and others who fear that computers will somehow displace the "old-fashioned" artists who draw with pencils and ink. Yet just as it isn't a pencil that makes an artist, neither is it a computer. It's what an artist has inside his head.

A computer is a tool, not a talent. The glossary definition given in my owner's manual says it best: "A man-made architecture that can receive and store instructions and execute them."

The rest is up to us.

Dave

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"I don't want SHATTER to be viewed as a stamp-pad comic or a Xerox comic."

MIKE SAENZ

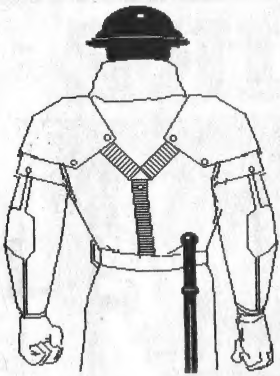
VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Mike Saenz.
Occupation: *(Laughter.)* I don't have one.

Born: 3 December 1959.
Residence: Chicago, Illinois — all my life.

Training: Very little conventional education. I went to my own school. For the most part, I went to my own school. Although I did graduate from Lane Tech High School in Chicago. I also took some college courses at American Academy of Art.
Credits: I have been doing illustration for about seven years, ever since I got out of high school. Mostly work for trashy magazines, ads, people's personal logos, small businesses. I don't want to talk about my "Gloria Steinem" centerfold, in MALE CHAUVINIST #1, okay. That is, like, the pinnacle of my trashiness.
Favorite Comics: I really like a lot of the underground stuff. I liked a lot of Rich Corben's stuff. S. Clay Wilson, too.
Favorite Color: Orange.
Favorite Opening Move in Chess: I don't play chess.
Favorite Movie: David Lean's OLIVER TWIST.
Favorite Band: Simple Minds. Their stuff consistently gets better.
Favorite Clothes Designer: Azzedine Alaia.
Marital Status: Not married.

"In school they used to call me Mr.



Studies for SHATTER.

The artist in transition — that's Mike Saenz. From his illustrative work done at a traditional drawing table for Marvel's EPIC ILLUSTRATED, to his experimental new SHATTER series for First Comics done entirely on computer, Mike has put himself through some changes . . . and taken some chances.

To find out all about this news-making — maybe even history-making — project, WXRT-FM reporter Charles Meyerson braved the Chicago cold and mountainous curbside snow-piles one arctic day in January to pay a visit to Mike Saenz in his futuristic apartment (a loft in a converted factory).

CHARLES MEYERSON: *Is it a) just coincidence, b) self-fulfilling prophecy, c) a great marketing strategy, that you — the creator of the first computer-generated comic book — pronounce your name "science"?*

MIKE SAENZ: None of the above.

CHARLES: *What is the connection?*

MIKE: "Signs" is actually more appropriate. "Science" is the Spanish pronunciation.

CHARLES: *One syllable.*

MIKE: It is a Portugese name, I believe, although I am an American mutt.

CHARLES: *Was the name an influence on you growing up?*

MIKE: Yeah, in high school and grade school they used to call me Mr. Science, after the bald-headed guy in all the science films. I guess science was my religion. I am not a Christian Scientist, though.

CHARLES: *Is there a connection between everyone calling you Mr. Science and your interest in computers? Or is your interest in computers incidental?*

MIKE: I have a true interest in science. Not on an academic level, but I am a science fan. I am not a techno-buff or a computer hack. I try not to talk like a computer hack, but now that I have been working with the Macintosh for a year, there are a lot of buzz words that are used in working with personal computers that are utilized for business purposes.

CHARLES: *How did you and the Macintosh come to meet?*

MIKE: A friend of mine named **Mark Canter**, who is president of a company called Macromind, turned me on to the Macintosh, because I wanted to get into computer graphics. I had been at his place at a party, and had been introduced to what was relatively a toy at the time — the Commodore 64 and software referred to as the Koala Pad. It is just a doodling toy, and you get a nice range of colors.

I noticed that I could work with a stylus, which is just a plastic stick and a bit pad —

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Science. I guess science was my religion."

SHATTER © 1985 First Comics, Inc.

in layman's terms, just a sensitive pad that interfaces with the computer. And I noticed that a lot of drudgery was cut out by drawing on the bit pad with the stylus: I wasn't dropping my pencil and picking up a T-square and a triangle and a marker, I didn't have to sharpen my pencils, and I could select the palette from a color range. Or I could select from various brush shapes and functions and mirror-imaging and circles and ellipses and squares and lines and what have you.

When I talked to Mark about bigger computers, he said, "What you need is the Macintosh." A friend of mine picked up an early Mac when they weren't readily available yet. I played with it for about a half an hour. I printed out a drawing, I stuffed it in my pocket, and I went home and thought about it. It didn't impress me, at first, because it wasn't in color — and I am very sensitive to color. After thinking about it for a few days, I decided that I could do comic books with it, which would be worth a try. So I sat down with the Mac — borrowed it — and worked with it for about a month. I came up with some sample pages. I got very excited. Saw that I could do lettering, with the typesetting functions of the machine, do the balloons, just about everything that you need for the production of a comic-book page on this machine.

CHARLES: *After you realized you could do comics, what came next?*

MIKE: I sent the stuff to a number of places. I had been working for EPIC ILLUSTRATED for about five years and I sent it to **Archie Goodwin**, who is my editor. Those samples were very crude — I don't blame him for turning me away. But I worked on it. I believed in it. I had faith in it.

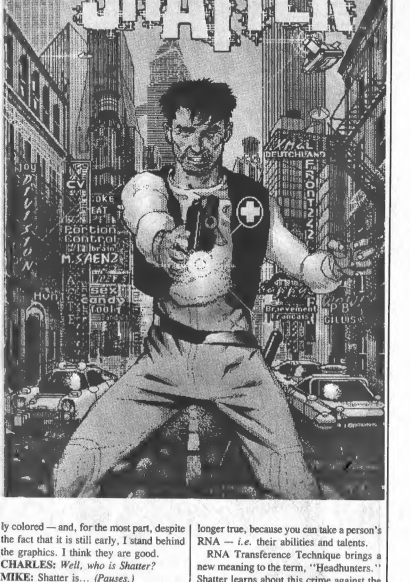
The next company that I approached with it was First. Editors **Mike Gold** and **Rick Oliver** were both Mac owners and users. I figured they'd be open to it, so I sent it to them. At first they were interested but not enthusiastic.

CHARLES: *When did they get enthusiastic?*

MIKE: As I got better with the medium, as the stuff got to look more like comics — real comics — as opposed to a lot of random illustration thrown together on a page. We were in communication for several months after that, back and forth, while I was sending them more samples. Meanwhile, I was doing other comics for EPIC, eight-pagers.

CHARLES: *For the folks who have haven't seen it yet, how do you describe SHATTER? What is it?*

MIKE: What is it? It is still under development. The first book is, in my opinion, nicely colored — and, for the most part, despite the fact that it is still early, I stand behind the graphics. I think they are good.



CHARLES: *Well, who is Shatter?*

MIKE: Shatter is... *(Pauses.)*

CHARLES: *If these are too tough, I can come back tomorrow.*

MIKE: Shatter is a bum. He lives and works in the future and he is a bit of a victim. He is our hero and he will eventually save the day. The premise behind SHATTER — the major premise behind the plot — is best understood by referring to a quote from **Ben Franklin**, who once said that if a man empties his purse into his head, no one can take it from him. Well, in the future, this is no longer true, because you can take a person's RNA — *i.e.* their abilities and talents.

RNA Transference Technique brings a new meaning to the term, "Headhunters." Shatter learns about this crime against the creative world perpetrated by the Executariat and he becomes an essential figure in stopping it.

CHARLES: *How would you describe the setting? Apparently, it is Chicago. Daley City?*

MIKE: It's Chicago. All of Illinois has become Chicagoland through expansion of the city. It is renamed Chicagoland. Chicago — the town itself — becomes Daley City after **Richard J. Daley**.

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"I had come up with a character who was pretty much a zero...a real nothing."

CHARLES: *Are you painting an optimistic future? Or a pessimistic future? Or both?*

MIKE: I think it is a realistic future. For instance, an idea perpetrated by personal computer users and developers is the Theory of the Dynabook — in effect, a portable Macintosh that allows you to, yes, paint on it, animate, make music, watch television programs, have teleconference phone calls, is a telecommunications device and powerful computer — and you walk around the street with it, much like a Walkman. In the future this has really changed their whole way of life.

CHARLES: *That's part of SHATTER?*

MIKE: Yeah. Everything. What you have is a change in the way we live our lives. Let me give you a little example. You are 18 years old, the year is 2030, you move out of your home, and there are things that you need. You need a stereo, TV, a telephone, a job. Dynabook is your everything. So you get it for your graduation present and you are off, whether you decide to live with a friend, sleep on a park bench or stay in a flop house. You have the tool to communicate with the world. You have the power to connect with this huge world, and connect with this huge body of knowledge, and it makes the land of opportunity much more of a land of opportunity.

CHARLES: *How did you eventually hook up with Peter Gillis.*

MIKE: Peter was the only writer in Chicago who was open to it.

CHARLES: *In what sense?*

MIKE: Well, I guess I just lied. I didn't approach anyone else with it. Peter was just a writer who lived in my neighborhood. This may sound ridiculous — but I was working at home on the project and I didn't really have the confidence to write it, even though I had written a number of stories. I said to Peter, "I've got this project I want you to take a look at." And it turned out that he was an Apple III user. He uses word processing to write comics. I guess he writes MICRONAUTS and THE DEFENDERS at Marvel that way, and one or two other books.

CHARLES: *Let me back up. Is SHATTER your creation? Did you have the plot and the visuals worked out?*

MIKE: SHATTER is my creation, but it wasn't called SHATTER, it was called ZERO — and the reason it was called ZERO was because my mind was a blank for a name.

CHARLES: *I can see the logic there.*

MIKE: Actually, there's more to it than that. I had come up with a character who was pretty much a zero — I guess I was a little bit inspired by FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON. Maybe more inspired by THE STARS MY DESTINATION, by **Alfred Bester**. He was supposed to start as a real nothing, as a real zero. I didn't say, "Peter, this is what we are going to do whether you like it or not — I want you to ghostwrite it." It wasn't like that at all. I told him what I had been working on, showed him the visuals, and he took another approach — which is the same story, the same flavor. Peter took that concept and added a lot of really fun things: nifty set decortsion like bio-engineered life-forms that you could spray onto a brick wall. Their DNA would dictate them to etch circuitry onto the exterior of a building. Things like that. Fun science fiction, heavy on the fiction.

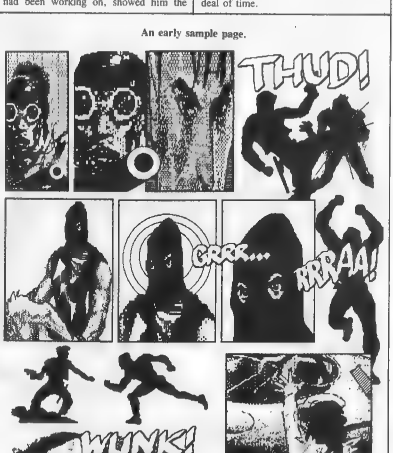
CHARLES: *How did you and Peter work together — Marvel-style or otherwise?*

MIKE: Well, we tried a number of styles, and none of them have been quite satisfactory on my part.

CHARLES: *What worked the best?*

MIKE: Sitting around and talking for a good deal of time.

An early sample page.



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"Computers are the future of commercial

CHARLES: *Do you transmit your work over the phone on a modem?*

MIKE: Ideally, Peter would write on a Mac, we would link though a modem, he would send me the script over the phone lines, I would draw it and send it to First over the phone lines, and then they would edit and print out the material. This isn't set up as yet. I am a little bit afraid of it, because that would result in my and Peter's worst nightmare, which is — never being able to leave the house!

CHARLES: *Why don't you explain about some of the lines, the shadings in your art for SHATTER — are things like that pre-programmed?*

MIKE: Yes. I am working with a modification of **Bill Atkinson's** MacPaint, which was the introductory drawing software for the Macintosh. The difference with my software is that with help from my friends at Macromind —

CHARLES: *What is Macromind?*

MIKE: Macromind is **Mark Canter, Jay Fenton**, and **Mark Pierce**. They are developers. They develop software for the Macintosh. Macromind is here in Chicago, right around the corner from me.

CHARLES: *This is a real neighborhood project!*

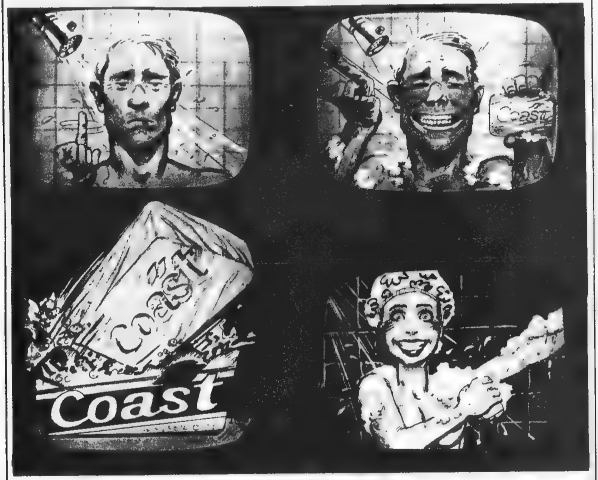
MIKE: Yeah, it is. Anyway, with the help of Macromind I've altered the software and used some of their utilities and applications. Something called Art Thief or Art Grabber allows you to move into other documents that you have drawn. Say you're working on page six and you want to use panel 1 from page one as a basis for that drawing. Say you want to use the background or the character's face. With Grabber or Art Thief you can go directly to that document. Not to say that you can't do that with MacPaint — but Art Grabber allows you to by-pass a number of steps so that you can do that a lot faster

CHARLES: *It allows you to avoid the cutting and pasting of photocopies that other artists would have to use?*

MIKE: Exactly. I don't want SHATTER to be viewed as a stamp-pad comic or a Xerox comic. Even though there is a lot of repetitive artwork, it has been changed: I have brought it into a new layout, flipped it, flopped it and re-drawn it — that kind of thing. What it is, actually, is an aid to continuity. It is not cheating. I work a lot harder on these pages than I would using traditional methods. The difference is that I work faster.

It's very hard to layout pages using this format. You are looking through a small window.You can't see your entire page while you are drawing. The effect is that your pages tend to be a little too two-dimensional. They are kind of flat-looking. I'm working against that all of the time. I guess you could compare the approach to — I'm thinking of **Kurt Vonnegut's** description of a Trafalmadorian's version of

"What led me to computers was a specific problem in one corner of commercial art: Storyboarding."



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art. It is a logical progression."

how earthlings see their lives — you are strapped to a rail-car looking through an eight-foot length of pipe on the horizon as the car speeds from the point in which you are born until the point that you die. I think **Kurt Vonnegut** describes it much better in SLAUGHTERHOUSE 5.

CHARLES: *And that's analogous to you, working on the Macintosh?*
MIKE: Yes, it's like you are looking through a little window drawing with a pen up your asshole. It is very hard to do. I don't recommend this to anyone unless they are willing to devote at least six months of their time to overcoming some of the disadvantages of the process. I think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages — that is what kept me in there. Other artists may feel the same way.

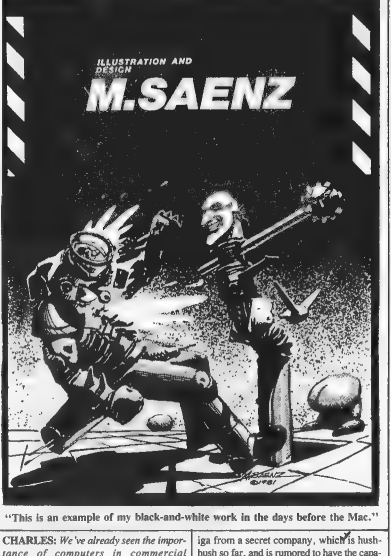
CHARLES: *Are you tempted before you send your work to the printer to go back with pen and ink to touch things up.*
MIKE: No. I haven't done any of that and I don't care to. I am real fixed on generating the entire work on the machine. The only thing that I have done not using the machine is color the book. It was a blue-line approach and I colored it with airbrush paints.

CHARLES: *How long did it take you from the time you started working with the Macintosh to the point where you felt competent with it?*
MIKE: I still don't feel competent *enough* with it. A year.

CHARLES: *I notice you use the Mac's voice synthesizer to answer your phone. What else does this computer do for you — if anything?*
MIKE: Well, I can make music with it. My friends at Macromind have produced a thing called Musicworks which allows me to write music. I can't read or write a note of music. But with Musicworks I can use a grid system to write music the way it has never been written before. The product is selling very well to Mac fans all over. I am a big music fan. I think that I am a bit of a musician.

CHARLES: *Now.*
MIKE: . . .Now. Well, no, I've always had an ear for it. Now I can write scores. I'd like to write scores for my comic books.

CHARLES: *What does SHATTER mean in the history of comics, if anything? Is this a landmark?*
MIKE: It is, because I believe — I firmly believe — that computers are the future of commercial art. It is a very logical progression.



"This is an example of my black-and-white work in the days before the Mac."

CHARLES: *We've already seen the importance of computers in commercial animation.*
MIKE: Right. Station identification, logotype effects. It can be utilized at *all* levels of commercial art. The computers just aren't in existence yet, but they are on the way.

CHARLES: *So you think that most comics can or will be generated, all or in part, on computers.*
MIKE: No, I think that if everybody switched over to using computers, it would be quite boring. That is, if they used the Macintosh. I should point out that there are other computers that are coming out that will allow you to draw comic books. I may move on from the Macintosh to another system.

CHARLES: *Do you have another one in mind?*
MIKE: There is something called the Amiga from a secret company, which is hush-hush so far, and is rumored to have the capabilities of the Macintosh. It has a 68,000 chip.

CHARLES: *Could what you are doing be done now with any other computer?*

MIKE: Nope. Other computers wouldn't be so cost effective. There are systems that you can use to draw comic books — but they are $400,000 systems. The difference is that the Macintosh is a very graphic computer. And your drawings happen in real-time, which is to say that as you draw them — as you move your mouse — you see them at very nearly the same time on your screen. Other computers don't do that. But personal computers are getting more powerful and more "user-chummy" and more inexpensive and more graphics-oriented, so I have high hopes for the future of personal computers and their relation to commercial art.

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"I didn't set out to be a comic-book artist . . . I have aspirations towards more serious art."

© 1985 Mike Saenz

CHARLES: *Is your interest in personal computers purely an offshoot of your interest in commercial art, or were they independent interests you managed to comingle in this project?*
MIKE: What led me to computers was a specific problem in one corner of commercial art: storyboarding, which requires you to turn out loads of marker drawings overnight. You have to work fast, and it has to be competent and you have to draw the product. Say it's Quaker Oats Cereal. The image of the box may come up in the commercial three or four times, and the storyboardist will draw it each time. I think that is ridiculous. Computers can eliminate all that. It is not a new idea but it is the idea that pushed me to computers.

CHARLES: *How do you support yourself primarily? The income from SHATTER has barely begun, I imagine.*
MIKE: Well, it is just trickling in now, but I do manage to support myself with all the various ad work that I do. It is primarily commercial art, whether that's ads, or storyboarding, or logos or design, or graphics of whatever kind.

CHARLES: *Is anyone else doing this kind of computer work?*
MIKE: Not that I know of. There is one other person doing graphics on the Mac that I know of and he's part of Macromind, and he is primarily doing animation.

CHARLES: *What kind of a demand have you found for computer-generated art? I've seen a few of the ads that you've done for Chicago nightclubs. Is there a growing demand for artwork done by computer?*
MIKE: I am trying to create that demand.

CHARLES: *What kind of success are you having?*
MIKE: A lot. There was a time when I just didn't have enough work — these days I just don't have any time.

CHARLES: *Do you work with pen and ink any more? Or is it all with the Macintosh?*
MIKE: I don't do any work with pen and ink at all. If I am working with black and white, I work with the Mac. If I have to work with color, I don't work with the Mac, of course, so I go back to my traditional technique with acrylics.

CHARLES: *Let's talk a little about marketing.*
MIKE: Hopefully, I will bridge two markets — the personal computer market and the comics market, and attract a lot of other

"People want me behind a *lab* of personal

attention because it is a first — the first comic book ever generated by a computer.

CHARLES: *Is SHATTER going to be available outside the regular comics distribution channels?*

MIKE: The people with the marketing ideas are the people at First. They are still talking about methods of marketing. I would like to see it at the newsstands, or maybe not.

CHARLES: *Why not?*

MIKE: Well, maybe I'd like to see it in bookstores. Maybe I'd like to see a bigger, more tightly packaged version of it on the shelves of bookstores and in computer stores.

CHARLES: *What kind of help are you getting from Apple on this book?*

MIKE: None. I don't know what kind of interest Apple may have in it — I do believe that SHATTER will sell more Macintoshes. If Apple takes an interest, it may be because of that.

CHARLES: *Let's go back — back... back to the far reaches of your past. Before there were computers. Before there were mice — or mouses, as I've seen them referred to in some ads. What were your influences? How did you learn to draw figures? What were your first drawings?*

MIKE: Mad scientists biting women's toes off. These were grade school doodles. As a matter of fact, they have them down in my school records.

CHARLES: *Influenced by anyone?*

MIKE: No. Just my life.

CHARLES: *Did you learn the bulk of what you know about drawing from Lane Tech?*

MIKE: Lane Tech had a really fantastic art department. It was a four-year course. It was really college-level. It's why I didn't need to go on to any higher-level commercial art education. I am really thankful for that course. I made good on it, because I was one of the very few serious art students in high school. I knew what I wanted to do before I went to Lane Tech — that was why I went to Lane Tech, as a matter of fact.

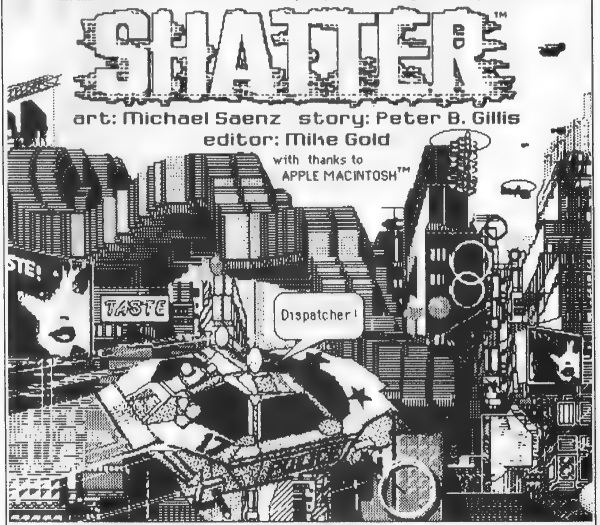
CHARLES: *Did you set out to be a commercial artist?*

MIKE: I didn't really set out to be a commercial artist or a comic-book artist or a fine-arts painter or anything. I just knew that I wanted to illustrate.

CHARLES: *Whose work do you like.*

MIKE: I am really enamored of Early American Impressionists. On a more contemporary level, **Ed Pashke**. His work really impresses me. **Pashke** is a big Chicago artist.

Utilizing sophisticated software, every aspect of Saenz's work on SHATTER is being generated on the Apple Macintosh, using the small hand-held "mouse" and the software's capability to access all images on a dot-by-dot basis.



SHATTER © 1985 First Comics, Inc

computer applications to advertising art."

SHATTER © 1985 First Comics, Inc.

CHARLES: *We must be talking serious art here, then.*

MIKE: Yeah, it is serious art. I have aspirations towards more serious art.

CHARLES: *How about in comics?*

MIKE: In comics: **Alex Toth** and **Jack Kirby.**

CHARLES: *Are other comic-book companies interested in seeing your computer-generated work?*

MIKE: Yes. Marvel is interested. **Archie Goodwin** is interested in the process now that I have brought it to the appropriate level. I think that I am going to be doing more stuff for EPIC ILLUSTRATED and I think that I am going to be doing it with the Macintosh.

There are other comic-book professionals who are also interested in learning the process. I know that they are working very hard, and it is taking a lot of their time. I know that I don't have any life to speak of because I am devoting so much time and energy to this project. I know that other professionals working in this industry are encountering the same problem. As I said before, this system allows you to work faster. It eliminates a lot of drudgery. I think that you work just as hard, if not harder. But I think that you'll have more time to travel and have fun. As I have said, I think it is the future of commercial art.

CHARLES: *Can we look forward to a Mike Saenz School of Commercial Art?*

MIKE: **Rick Obadiah** has been talking about opening a school.

CHARLES: *Seriously?*

MIKE: Seriously. But, actually, there are more important things going on. People in the computer industry want me to be behind a school of, a *lab* of personal computer applications to advertising art. I have been getting a number of proposals in the last couple of weeks. So things are happening a little fast right now. That may die down. I don't have an over-inflated head about it. Don't get me wrong. Privately, I think that this stuff is hot shit. I'd like to see it skyrocket. But I know that there has been a lot of negative response. First of all, a lot of people get their bills on computer print-out paper and their response to a computer-generated comic book is, "What? How can they do this! "

CHARLES: *What's next for you after SHATTER?*

MIKE: More books. I would like to do some trade paperback computer-generated books. I would like to do some computer animation. I am just now getting into working with bigger and better computers. I would like to hopefully make a name for myself.

CHARLES: *I like your name as it is.* (Laughter.)

MIKE: Make a name hopefully for myself in the field of computer graphics, but make them more accessible to the public, definitely — because most computer-generated graphics that people come into contact with are station identification logo effects while watching television. Their eyes just kind of glaze over when they see that. They are really no different from the photographic effects they took the place of. They don't stand out in any great way. I think comic books are something that everybody knows of — everyone is familiar with comic books, whether they read them or not. Why else would we have funnies in the newspapers? There is a certain fascination there.

I think that comics are an abstract artform. They can alter your sense of time. For instance, only in comic books can you write about ten families' lives before the fall of an atomic bomb and have on each page an image of a stopwatch as it ticks off milliseconds before the detonation. To try to pull that off in moving images, TV or movies, you'd have this watch tick off a millisecond and you'd have twenty minutes of drama and then you'd have the watch once again. You'd go,"Hey, wait a minute. I saw that watch twenty minutes ago, what do you mean that it has only moved a millisecond!" In comics, I think that you can get away with that sort of distorted time sense.

CHARLES: *You can convey that sense of simultaneity. I like that. Ultimately, where is* **Mike Saenz** *going to be after twenty years?*

MIKE: If I live, I'd like to do more serious art, and I'd like to bring sequential imagery — the artform known as comic books or storyboarding — to more serious art. Not do the sort of bullshit that **Roy Litchtenstein** did. I'd like to see the stuff in galleries. Not SHATTER — it wouldn't be anything like SHATTER. It would be big, on canvas or plastic or whatever. Something nice that you can hang over your couch and pay $100,000 for.

CHARLES: *And you'd get the $100,000?*

MIKE: No, it would go to the gallery owner. *(Laughter.)*

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"You can't really trace with the Mac."

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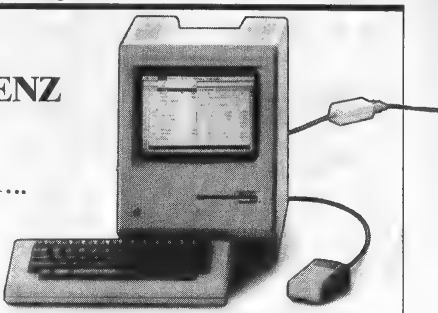
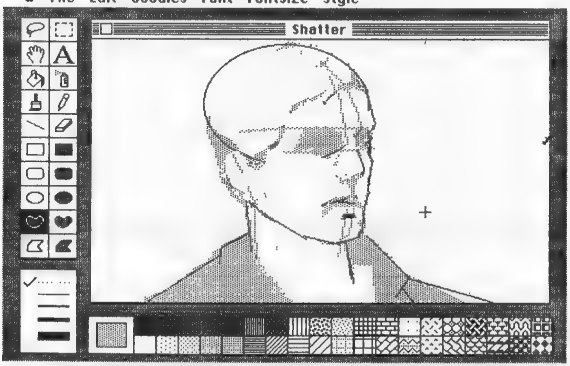


The Macintosh 128K with mouse.

CHARLES: *Let's get down to the nuts and bolts of this thing. How do you use a computer to draw? Let's start with the concept of a "mouse." How would you describe it?*

MIKE: It's a box about the size of a pack of cigarettes. A rubber ball contained in the device rotates as you pass it over the flat surface of your desktop, and this translates to your pointer or cursor on your screen, which you can use to select functions and modes and palette shades and brush shapes. I use the mouse for just about everything. There



The MacPaint screen of the Apple Macintosh. Let's begin a drawing. I've sketched a head.

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THE COMICS JOURNAL #100

INTERVIEWS WITH: (believe it or not)

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CHRIS CLAREMONT on life with the mutants
WILL EISNER on personal fiction
STEVE ENGLEHART on returning to comics
MIKE FRIEDRICH on the marketing of comic books
BILL GAINES on Mad today
STEVE GERBER on Void Indigo, G.I. Joe, and Marvel
DICK GIORDANO on running DC Comics
ARCHIE GOODWIN on Marvel's Epic Comics
JACK JACKSON on chronicling the history of Texas
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KENNETH SMITH on moral entertainment
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LEN WEIN on declining standards, and editing at DC Comics
AL WILLIAMSON on syndicates and inking Superman
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"There is a lot of self-training with the mouse."

is a stylus out — that I don't have yet — which fits into your hand the way an airbrush fits your hand. It has a button on it and it works with a bit pad.

CHARLES: *Do you use the mouse to trace patterns on the table?*

MIKE: I don't trace. You can't really trace with the Mac. What you have to get used to when working with the mouse is that you are not watching the drawing under your hand — you are watching the drawing, seemingly drawing itself on a screen. So there is a lot of self-training involved working with the mouse.

CHARLES: *I've used one for brief periods. It's hard to do. How do you manipulate it with the accuracy you have mastered in your work with the Mac? How do you get so precise with your drawings?*

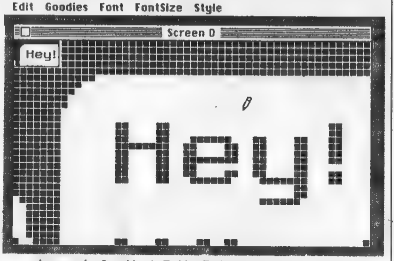
MIKE: Sheer determination.

CHARLES: *Do you have any other tools besides the mouse?*

MIKE: Well, I just picked up MacVision, which is a digitizing system, which means that I can take an image from a video tape or a direct line off a video camera and patch it through the system, and it will break it up into digits, pixels. Dots. That's what pixels are.

CHARLES: *So you can take something that you are looking at through the camera and turn it into a Macintosh drawing?*

MIKE: Exactly, although I am not using it yet. I just picked it up, and I haven't used it on the first SHATTER book. I should point that out — none of the images in that book are digitized. They are all out of me. They are out of my head.



An example of working in Fatbits. Each square represents a pixel.

CHARLES: *All of those intricate lines are done with this mouse?*

MIKE: Yes.

CHARLES: *That is amazing! Mike, how about laying out a page for us, giving us a step-by-step description of what you're doing and how you're doing it?*

Block in blacks. Shade.

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STORY BY KEN MITCHRONEY MARK CANTRELL
ART BY KEN MITCHRONEY

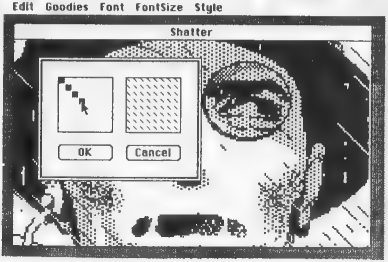
"It is a lot easier than Zip-A-Tone."

SHATTER © 1985 First Comics, Inc.

MIKE: Okay. We are waiting for the software to kick in. The machine is a little bit slow. I don't have the 512K Mac, which I'd like to have to do all of this stuff on. It's a lot faster and more powerful. It has more memory. It moves faster, consequently.

I have just called up a "format grid," which conforms to the printed size of a page from SHATTER. As you can see, it is laid out in nine divisions with the center line. Now I am going to use Art Thief or Grabber to call up an image that I have stored on a separate disk — a separate batch of data. It is actually from one of my earlier pages from SHATTER.

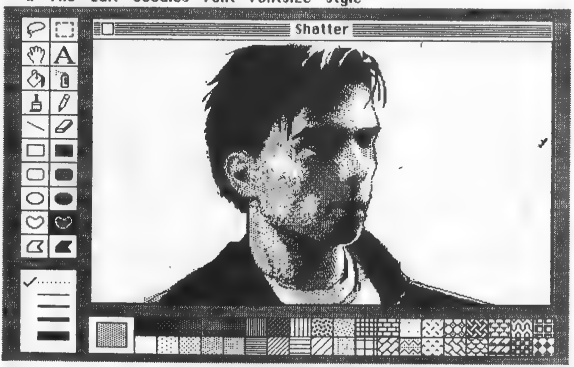
Now I am calling up page twelve from SHATTER. I can scroll the image — by which I mean that I can take a look at a small part of it and move around and look at other parts of the entire page of art. Now I have seen something that I want, and I am going to select it. There is a small image of SHATTER walking down the street. By selecting it with my cursor, I am indicating a box around him. I am going to hit the function Swipe, which will capture that image. Now I will close Art Thief and, using the edit mode, I will paste the image of Shatter on my page — take that image from the old drawing and move it to some new location on what is basically a blank page in the computer.



An example of how shade screens can be modified.

Now that I have him there, I can use an expanded function with a few keyboard commands, and blow the image up. Now that I have enlarged it, I will flip it horizontally, so he is facing the other way. Now I am going to invert it, which will give me a negative image. What was black is now white, and what was white is now black.

Now I am going to fill the black areas with a pattern screen, so the areas that were black



Now I'm cooking. Folks at home: Don't try this.

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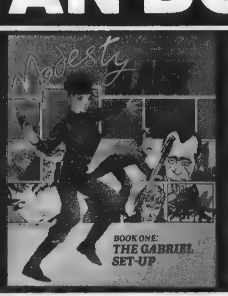

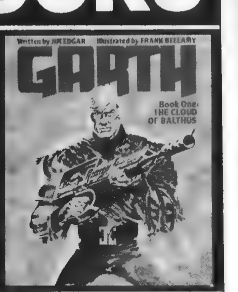

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"I am pretty much a perfectionist."

become now comparable to Zip-a-Tone. This gives me a range of screens and shades. They don't go by percentages, but on the lower part of the screen, I do have a mathematically-designed shading system which allows me to shade smoothly. You can fill an area with a few dots, or slightly more dots, getting more and more dense patterns. It is a lot more exciting and faster than working with Zip-a-Tone and cleaner and more fun.

There are some shortcuts you can use to draw squares and rectangles and ovals. I merely select a mode with my cursor, on the outside of the radius, and as I drag the mouse, I can draw an ellipse or a perfectly true circle. I can also select the line-width of the circle. I can fill the circle with an indicated shade.

Bascially, the distance that you move the mouse determines the radius of the circle.

CHARLES: *Anything else you want to demonstrate?*

MIKE: How easy it is to letter. I am drawing a balloon right now. A few seconds later the balloon is drawn and now I am setting the typesetting function and I am typing in — literally *typing* in — what Shatter is saying.

CHARLES: *Which looks like CHEEPA CHEEPA JIG MOG.*

MIKE: That is it exactly. Let's see, what else is there? I can go into "Fat Bits." This allows me to go down to each pixel on a singular level and erase it and change it.

CHARLES: *You're magnifying the picture so that you can see every single dot?*

MIKE: Yes. Then, I can draw on a very small scale. That allows me to detail the renderings highly. Next I am going to "Show Page," so I can see where I am on the page, and I can move from the first panel down to the second panel. It takes a little while for it to come up on the screen.

I can select brush shapes. When I do this, I have 32 brush shapes and sizes — I can select a brush and the pattern I am going to use with the brush.

CHARLES: *It's sort of like the cartoons where they can paint a wall in plaid?*

MIKE: Yes. Immediately. It is a lot easier than Zip-a-Tone or what **Howard Chaykin** uses on FLAGG! — duotone paper, which utilizes one of two chemicals to bring out one of the screen patterns impregnated in the paper. That is a chemical process. This way, I don't have any brushes to rinse. No X-acto blades, no pencil shavings, no eraser crumbs. It's all clean.

I am erasing right now. I would like to erase my whole book and start all over again.

CHARLES: *You're kidding.*

MIKE: No, I am not kidding. I am pretty much a perfectionist, and I am not happy with all of SHATTER. If I had my chance, I'd get back in, and draw it all over again.

CHARLES: *What would you change?*

MIKE: Everything. The entirety of it. One of the reasons that I was really drawn to computers is that it would allow me to make drastic changes in the graphics before I actually handed them to my publisher.

CHARLES: *Because it's so easy to make changes, as a perfectionist do you find you're inclined never to finish?*

MIKE: Yes. In the beginning, I thought this would give me a chance to change *some* things. But since it is *so* easy to change things, I am *always* changing things.

I was actually late on my deadline by one day. I had an unheard-of tight deadline on this book, and I was late by a day because I was making changes.

An example of lettering and a bit of fun with the inverting mode.

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"In THE MICRONAUTS it would have been

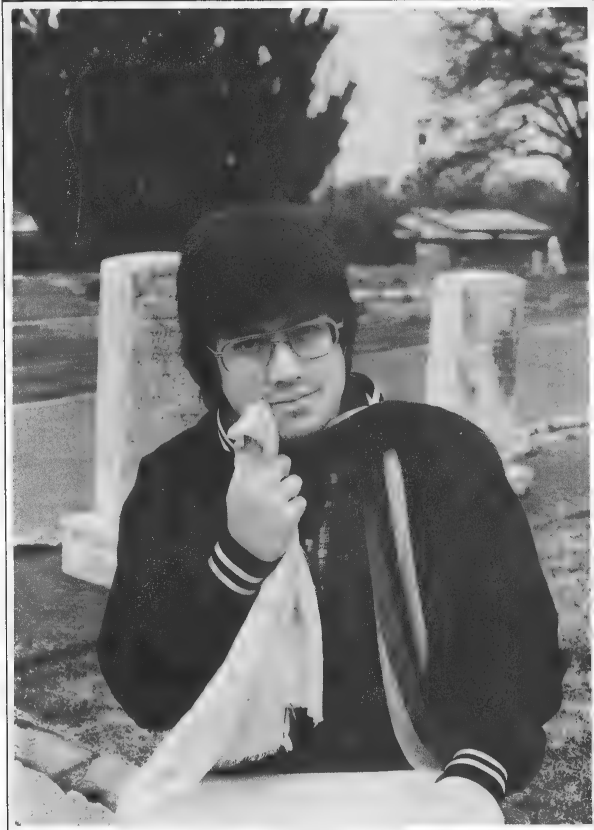

Photo: Jon E. Vinson

appropriate to be more explicit with sex or violence."

KELLEY JONES

A few words about the photo of Kelley Jones and, excuse the pun, it being in bad taste. We wanted something different. So, on a cool, wintery February day, with the overhead sky as grey as the Frankenstein monster's complexion in the old Karloff-Universal horror films, we arrived at Kelley's home to take his picture.

We went out into his backyard, where his father has an old Plymouth under a tarp. The car looks like a pale, slightly battered cousin to Stephen King's Christine. We had him pose on the chrome-ornate hood of the car, holding a cacti. Then we posed him among the bare, slim branches of a tree, where it appeared that the branches had come alive. We had him sharing the lens with a shovel, a neon sign for a lite beer, his own reflection, and a variety of other objects. After shooting about half the film, and growing tired of shivering, we went back inside.

However, we still weren't satisfied with the film we had shot. Then, Kelley suggested the cemetery.

Now, let me explain a little about Kelley and why this suggestion was the absolutely natural (or, perhaps, appropriately unnatural) one for Kelley to make. For one thing, Kelley's favorite writers are Poe, Lovecraft, and King. He has a half-dozen illustrated versions of Poe's tales and just spent a tidy sum on a rare edition of Poe's THE RAVEN illustrated by the great Gustave Dore. One of Kelley's major ambitions is to illustrate some of Lovecraft's tales, maybe even contribute something to the Cthulu Mythos. And Kelley considers King one of the great writers of the modern age, and is grateful that King has made the genre so popular.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Kelley Jones
Born: 23 July 1962 — Sacramento
Residence: Citrus Heights, CA
Training: "I'm self-taught. Does it show?"
Comics Credits: Formerly inker, currently penciller, of THE MICRONAUTS.
Favorite Comics: X-MEN, by Claremont-Byrne-Austin; Kirby's THOR; SWAMP THING by Wrightson.
Favorite Movie: THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN.
Favorite Music: Anything but Jazz.
Pet Peeve: People who take comics too seriously.
Favorite One-Liner: You're ten of the most boring people I know.

Also, the artist Kelley most admires is Berni Wrightson. Wrightson's most beautifully horrific work has been in the horror field, whether it be his work for the DC horror comics,/ his collaboration with King on CREEPSHOW and the Werewolf book, or his masterpiece, the illustrated FRANKENSTEIN. Kelley loves to be scared by others and, more importantly, he loves to scare others. Kelley is one of the night people, one of those comfortable with the giving of nightmares.

So it was absolutely in character for Kelley to suggest that we visit a nearby cemetery. The picture you see here is the one he selected as being the most tasteful. Excuse the pun.

As for the artist, himself — Kelley loves to draw. Working for comics is exactly what he thought it would be like. He is quiet, and unassuming, a veteran professional in the field at the age of 22 (he's worked steadily on THE MICRONAUTS for the past several years — first as inker, now as penciller) who gets up at three in the afternoon and works until three in the morning. He takes his drawing seriously, but he doesn't take comics as a genre seriously. He does it because it is fun. He says the only thing he has taken seriously in the business is this interview. He apologizes for this lapse in his conduct.

"I'm hoping they'll call and say let's get

PETER QUINONES: *Kelley, how did you come out of nowhere and manage to land a regular series like THE MICRONAUTS at Marvel?*

KELLEY JONES: Well, I read in MARVEL FANFARE or one of the Bullpen Bulletins that they were looking for new talent. So, I sent in some samples — four pages of pencils and four of inks. They liked the inking more than the pencilling, so they let me ink a few poster pages on THE MICRONAUTS over **Butch Guice**. He liked what I'd done and happened to be looking for a new inker, so I got the job. I inked for about a year and then Butch was leaving. Also, the book was going from direct sales to the newsstands, and they were looking for a new artist. So I sent in some pencilling samples, they liked them, and they gave the book to me. It was as simple as that. No real hard sweat

PETER: *There must have been some competition . . .*

KELLEY: There were several people up for it. I don't know who they were. But **Ralph Macchio**, the editor of the book, liked my stuff and thought that I was very unpretentious. Ralph doesn't like pretentiousness.

PETER: *How'd you feel about the assignment, it being your first pencilling job?*

KELLEY: I was nervous that it was going to come out like dreck. I was lucky that **Bruce Patterson** did a real nice job on it.

PETER: *Your pencils are very tight. Do you expect the inker to follow your lines exactly?*

KELLEY: The one inker I need is **Bruce Patterson**. I haven't liked any of the others. And it's because I put a lot of time into a page. I don't ask them to trace — though I almost felt that I was doing that over Butch, because I wanted it to look like Butch. What I want — what I think every artist wants — is his style to be seen. I tell every inker: make it look like me, and then get fancy with Zip-A-Tone or whatever. I want them to pay attention to what I put down. I can be easily ruined because everything I put down is delicate and light. But, anyway, other than Bruce, I haven't really been that happy with the results of other inkers. Most of them can't do a real nice star-field, which is one of my tests of a good inker. When I ink, I really try to do a nice job on the stars.

PETER: *Would you like to ink your own pencils?*

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married — or something conjugal in nature."

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KELLEY: If there was the time. I am working on a KULL story that I'll be both penciling and inking. Maybe when I become a faster penciller I'll be able to ink more of my own stuff.

PETER: *I've noticed that Princess Marionette sometimes looks like Olivia Newton-John, and there was a pose by Solitaire that was taken from a Heather Thomas ad for Jack La Lanne's. Do you do these things just for the fun of it?*

KELLEY: Well, I'm hoping that they'll see it, be flattered, and then call me up and say let's get married — or something, hopefully conjugal in nature. I like to draw my favorite things into my stories. For example, I did a small tribute to Japanese animation in one of the issues Japanese animation has been the heaviest influence on my style, because they have a real knack for making things look like they work. And they have this incredible visual sense. Their stuff is the absolute best and they're incredibly quick — which is another thing I admire.

PETER: *Do you think of your characters in terms of actors?*

KELLEY: Sure. Always. It makes them easier to draw. I see Rann as Captain Kirk with a little **Harrison Ford** thrown in. I see Bug as **Tom Cruise** — you know, all the right moves. Solitaire is like **Elizabeth McGovern**. That's her look. Acroyear, well, this one is difficult because I don't know if people will understand the comparison, but I see him as a character played by **David Warner**. **Warner** is the guy that played Jack the Ripper in the movie TIME AFTER TIME. He was also in TIME BANDITS. It's more of the way he carries himself, the way that he delivers his lines. Physically, of course, nobody looks like Acroyear, who is about nine feet tall and a little less bulky than the Hulk. Mari's look changes with my infatuations. You'll be seeing a different model on which I'll be drawing her from — I'm not telling who. I'll see if anybody can guess.

THE MICRONAUTS cast of characters, from "The New Voyages," issue #11. Kelley "casts" the characters in his imagination as various actors.

PETER: *How do you turn a plot into pictures? Do you have to sketch things out a lot, or do you just begin drawing?*

KELLEY: I read the plot and I start getting images in my head. There have been only a few times that what I drew on the pages came out exactly how I saw it in my mind, but most of the time I'm pretty close. I don't thumbnail anything. I think it's a waste of time. Maybe it helps some artists, but I find it boring. Of course, I've had to erase some pages, having come up with a better layout than my original idea. But usually, the initial thing I see in my head is what I want to draw. Even if that panel is not contributing to the storytelling, if it has great visual impact, I'll stay with it. I'll always choose impact over storytelling in some of my panels — not all of them, of course. But sometimes you just want to show what you can do.

PETER: *What should a good comic-book page look like?*

KELLEY: It depends on the demands of the story. But I like five to six panels a page. Ideally, four to five if you're doing action sequences. The fight pages should look like **Kirby**'s work on THOR. I hate to do little sliver panels. I love the look of the Marvel comics of the 1965 to 1970 period. Also, **John Byrne** knows how to draw a good page. As for me, I love to draw big. That might also be an influence of movies. I pattern my work more after the wide-screen than that of a television screen. Everything should be bigger than life. And, besides, the comic-book page is small, so you can't draw too small

PETER: *Do you ever have artist's block?*

KELLEY: No, not really. If I have a problem coming up with something, I just sit down and figure it out pragmatically. What has to be in the panel? Who is the main figure? From what angle would I get the

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"Uninspired people do things like killing characters off because it's a ready-made dramatic device."

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most visual impact? If I answer those questions, I usually have the problem solved. Besides, I have 23 pages each issue, and if 18 of those pages come out looking right, then I feel I've done okay. I give myself a five-page leeway, because I know I'm going to be dissatisfied with something. Sometimes, since I don't like to jump ahead or draw pages out of sequence, but draw page-by-page, panel-by-panel, I feel like going back and reworking some of the earlier pages. But I resist that temptation if I can. When I was an inker, I used to skip all around — but I can't do that as a penciller.

PETER: *How do you discipline yourself?*

KELLEY: Guilt. I feel real bad if I make the inker late, because I used to be the inker. Besides, if the inker is rushed, then I don't look so good. Like I know Ralph has **Virginia Romita** asking where things are, and I don't like people taking the heat because I'm late. It's just not fair. Also, I like to see my work in print every month. That's not only a great pleasure, it's a steady paycheck. I'm not into this thing of every panel or line having to be perfect. I want the overall effect to look great, of course, but I try to get it right the first time around. And again, it's part of being professional. And besides, we're all friends on the book and I don't like to let down my friends. So I do a page a day. Sometimes more, but never less.

PETER: *Would you make any kind of drastic changes in the strip? Let's say, kill off a major character?*

KELLEY: You know, nobody wanted to change things during the Sixties at Marvel, because everybody was doing inspired work. CAPTAIN AMERICA was boring for a while, some time back, then **John Byrne** did some great stuff on it. Same for THOR. It was boring until **Walt Simonson** took over. All you need are talented, enthusiastic people on a book. Uninspired people do things like killing characters off because it's a ready-made dramatic device. One of my fears is that they'll kill a favorite character of mine before I have a chance to draw him. If killing a character is absolutely essential to the story, then fine. I liked Captain Marvel, but I'm really glad they handled him the way they did in THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN MARVEL graphic novel.

PETER: *How much of MICRONAUTS is your book? Do you contribute anything beyond the pencilling?*

Kelley does Darkseid...

KELLEY: Well, I change little things that may seem rough in the plot, and I'd like to think the *feel* of the book is mine, that you are in another universe. But it's more **Peter Gillis**' book than mine. I'm really just drawing what he wants. It's his vision and his experiments. He's trying to see if he can make science fiction work in what has been basically a genre for super-heroes. Peter really knows his science and wants to work in all these scientific theories and concepts.

As for me, I'm happy pencilling and making suggestions. Maybe on some future assignment I'll contribute some more of the plotting. At this point, I don't feel that competent at plotting yet.

PETER: *You say the book is experimenting with science fiction — how experimental do you feel Marvel is?*

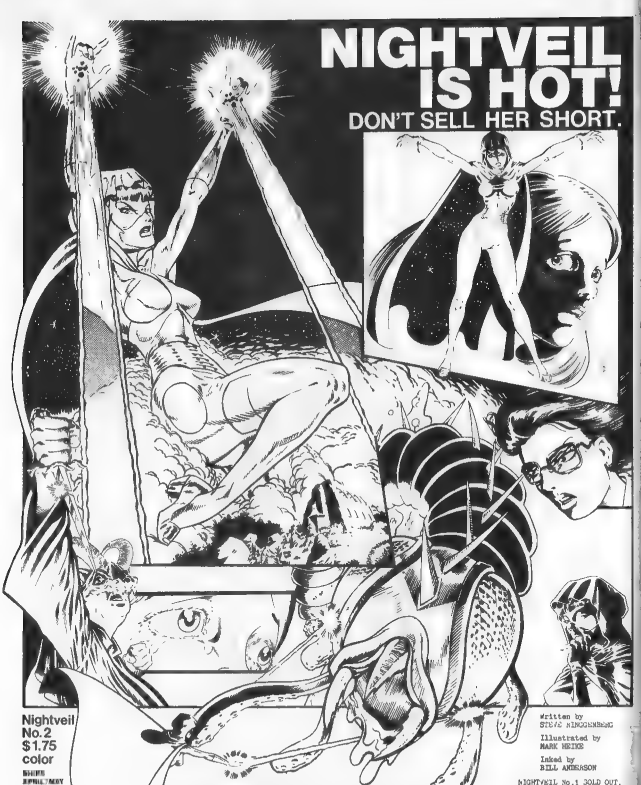
KELLEY: Well, there are certain things that you have to have in the artwork. Establishing shots and things like that. But they will let you go and take chances. Now a book like the current SWAMP THING is really, really good, but it's really hard to maintain that kind of quality. To take those kinds of chances, you have to be that good. If you have an **Alan Moore**, let him take chances.

PETER: *Does Marvel have an Alan Moore?*

KELLEY: I think they have potential **Alan Moores**. Not to be ingratiating, but I think Peter can be one. I think **Alan Zelenetz** certainly has the ability. For a time, **Claremont** was that way, experimental and not so self-indulgent. But, of course, you have to have the right strip. When you get the right person or team on the book, that's when something exciting is created.

PETER: *Are there any taboos you would like to break in comics? Such as more sex and violence, or a bit more nudity if the story asked for it?*

KELLEY: Nudity has never bothered me. If you do it wrong, then it's pornography, and I think that's why they have to police it. I mean, comic-book artists *always*, *always*, make all women look like centerfold material. Heroic proportions, right? But that's never bothered me, either way. As a matter of fact, there have been scenes in THE MICRONAUTS when I thought it would have been appropriate to be more explicit with either the sex or the violence — especially with the Bug and Solitaire characters. They kind of censored, in issue #6, with that towel, because she wasn't wearing anything when I drew her. That's the way it was written, and we thought it might get by, but it didn't. Then again, they'll let something gross go by — like in issue #8 when Huntarr's guts come out. They'll leave that in, which to me was a disgusting scene. They even said be careful when you draw it. But when I drew it, I figured, hey, they'll take care of it, they'll cover it up or something.



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AC COMICS

"It's really hard to be a fan of your own book when you're working on it."

Now I wish I hadn't been so graphic. It was nasty. That didn't really fit in the book. SWAMP THING, well, okay — or, in a horror story, that's how I would have done it. So I don't mind being more explicit. I wish more books were allowed to do such things, but not in the FANTASTIC FOUR. I don't want to see Sue naked, or Ben. I definitely don't want to see Acroyear in the buff. But in the offbeat books, why not?

PETER: *In your average comic book, there is a lot of action. Do you feel this is one of the elements of a good comic-book story?*

KELLEY: In a good story, at least for me, you have to have an interesting situation where your characters face a conflict. I want that conflict to be short and to the point. I would like it no more than five issues. Also, I want characterization, and this means as much characterization in the villains as in the heroes. And to make conflict interesting — visually, at least — and in this medium, you need action.

PETER: *How do you approach the characters as an artist?*

KELLEY: I treat them as individuals, but I draw them in terms of their alien race. Basically, they have to be humanoid — two legs, two eyes, that kind of thing. But what you can do to make them seem more alien than just coloring them different colors is to give them certain characteristics in the art. That's why all the bugs basically walk on all fours. I mean, not only Bug, but if I ever draw Kaliklak, they'll *all* walk on all fours, all be crouchy. I always felt it was irritating that for example, the Skrulls were all ugly except for the princess, and she was gorgeous. Why the exception? To me, all the Acroyears are eight to nine feet tall, even Cilica. *All* the women. And if it registers disgust, or if that's not right to us humans, that's fine. I figure if there were Acroyear readers they would comment on how pink and puny we are.

PETER: *So you're drawing for other readers besides human ones?*

KELLEY: Right! And if no other artist pays attention, fine. I want to give every race its differences. For example, in one of the issues I had to create some "cute" aliens. I never gave them chairs because I decided they would never sit. Instead, I gave them something that they would rest their bodies on. Little things like that, that probably won't get noticed, but which I try to do.

PETER: *So how do you see each of the characters as individuals? And what is your personal reaction to some of the things that have happened to the characters, such as the Bug-Marionette affair?*

. . . and Mr. Miracle, too.

KELLEY: The Bug-Marionette thing, I never minded that. Peter explained to me that she was raised in an alien society where different races were the norm. She doesn't have any kind of aversion to alien races. She was attracted by Bug's other qualities. But it's really hard to be a fan of your own book when you're working on it. You just don't notice the things that everyone else notices.

PETER: *What kind of loyalty do you feel to THE MICRONAUTS?*

KELLEY: Enough to where I didn't plan to leave them until I'd done about thirty great issues or they were cancelled. Any strip I get, I'd like to spend some time making mine. But everything has changed. I got the word the other day from Ralph. They're cancelling THE MICRONAUTS as of issue #17. We're not the only ones being cancelled — they're getting rid of about eight or nine titles altogether.

PETER: *Was it due to lack of sales?*

KELLEY: That might have been a factor in some of the other books, but we had almost tripled our readership in the last year or so. I'm sure the fact that THE MICRONAUTS, at least the name, is licensed to Marvel by another company might have been a factor — I don't really know.

PETER: *What now?*

KELLEY: Well, I've still got about five issues to go, so I've still got work to do before I take on other assignments. You'll see a definite change in my artwork, though. Take a look at these pages that I've done since I heard the news. Everything is bigger and weirder. I'm going to be doing four to five panels to a page, and really get a sense of power in my pencils. I've already talked to Peter, and we already know how everything is going to end. It's going to be a double-size issue, and I'm trying to go for the epic-type feel. There are going to be a lot of full-page spreads.

PETER: *You seem rather excited about the whole thing!*

KELLEY: Well, that's true. I'm more excited about the book now than I have ever been — but I'm also sad. You can't be part of something for almost four years and not be sad.

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"I would love to do something that was real blood-and-guts horror."

Also, beyond a few fill-in things, I haven't done anything besides THE MICRONAUTS, so it is kind of scary. Fortunately, Ralph assured me that he has plenty of projects to keep me busy every month. Which is great, especially since I just bought a house. So I'm looking forward to new things, maybe a mini-series or two, who knows? I'd like to keep working with Peter, since I think we make a good team. Also, I have a special project that I've been developing, and this might be the time to present it.

PETER: *After THE MICRONAUTS, what type of work would you like to to?*

KELLEY: I would like to do horror. I would love to do something that didn't shy away or back off, but was real blood 'n' guts horror. I'd like to shock somebody with the art. TWISTED TALES pulled the punch too much — and it was too uneven. In fact, you almost have to have every story a winner before you do a horror book. You can't telegraph the ending. To me, if you have someone say, "that's sick," then that's a good disgusting tale. As far as super-hero characters, I'd love to draw the Hulk and Thor. Other than that, I'd like to do various fill-in issues, just to draw different environments.

PETER: *Any thoughts about your career in comics so far?*

KELLEY: My big idol is **John Byrne** because he's able to keep producing good stuff for years and years. I may be one of the few, but I don't think that he's done anything so criminally bad that everybody rags on him all the time. He's done what I'd like to do. He's the Seventies' and Eighties' **Jack Kirby**. He doesn't try to be artsy, he just tries to be a good comic-book artist. He gets it out on time. Being a good producer, especially without sacrificing quality, means a lot to me. Anyone can draw a real artsy book if you give them three months, but give them three weeks — and if it comes out good, then that means something. That's professional. A professional artist and a fine artist are two different things. Comics are commercial, and **Byrne** understands this. He has picked up **Jack Kirby**'s baton. Me, I'm just getting comfortable on the starting blocks.

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"I worked at Marvel Studios. I designed Fire-Star, the female mutant."

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Rick Hoberg
Occupation: Story Illustrator
Born: Belton, TX
Residence: Long Beach, CA
Favorite Current Comics: TEEN TITANS, JOURNEY, BATMAN, GROO, SWAMP THING, CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS, AMERICAN FLAGG, RIO, SURGE mini-series
Favorite Writers: Ernest Hemingway, H. G. Wells, Mary Stewart, Isaac Asimov, Dashiell Hammett, Robert E. Howard.
Favorite Artists: Picasso, Van Gogh, Rodin, Degas, N. C. Wyeth, Andrew Wyeth, J. C. Leyendecker, Hal Foster, Wally Wood, Jack Kirby, Burne Hogarth.
Favorite TV Shows: FAWLTY TOWERS, TWO'S COMPANY, BURNS AND ALLEN, I SPY, NIGHT COURT, NOT NECESSARILY THE NEWS
Credits: Comic Books: 1975 — European TARZAN comics for editor Russ Manning; 1976-1978 — Marvel Comics: WHAT IF, KULL, STAR WARS, INVADERS; 1979-1980 — inker on Russ Manning's STAR WARS syndicated comic strip, line illustrations published in COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE STAR WARS UNIVERSE; 1982-present — penciller/inker on CAPTAIN CARROT, JUSTICE LEAGUE, ALL-STAR, SURGE, and BATMAN *Animation:* Entered Saturday morning animation as a layout artist on GODZILLA/SUPERFRIENDS. Moved on to storyboard artist/character designer on THUNDARR, SPIDER-MAN AND HIS AMAZING FRIENDS, G.I. JOE, THE HULK, MIGHTY ORBOTS, and many, many others. Animation work is now seen on the three major television networks, as well as on videocassette.

RICK HOBERG

Photo: Shel Dorf

"I've done almost everything in animation

In case you haven't noticed, Californian artists are really making their mark in comic books. It wasn't always that way. New York seemed to have it all locked up in all the comic art forms — except animation. Now things are spread around a little more. Talented people who also want the California "good life" can work out here and mail their stuff back east to the editorial offices. Express mail delivery and the other overnight services have opened the field right up. The comic-book companies themselves come out here to scout new talent at conventions.

For my first interview for David A. Kraft's great magazine, I've chosen Californian artist Rick Hoberg. I first met Rick at a West Coast Comic Club meeting in the City of Orange. Through the years I've watched him grow to national prominence. He's a hard-working, happy young man with a lot to share, and the long rap session that follows with Rick is not only enjoyable but should be professionally helpful to many readers...

SHEL DORF: *Rick, what are your duties in the animation field?*

RICK HOBERG: Well, I've done almost everything in the field, although I've done actual animation only a slight bit because I find it a very tedious thing — I don't enjoy it at all. The only full-type animation that I have done were some specials and some commercials that were done for Marvel Productions. It was Saturday-morning style, not **Walt Disney** or **Don Bluth**-type full animation. I have worked with the Japanese though. They do some very beautiful animation. In fact, at least three episodes of SPIDER-MAN were done by them, and I can unequivocably say were the best Saturday morning episodes done to this point. They are just stunning. They are just pure Marvel Comics. They are excellently animated. Of course, the storyboards were real good. I say that for me and for **Will Meugniot** and **Larry Houston**, who did most of them.

SHEL: *Is that mostly what you've been doing — storyboarding for Marvel?*

RICK: I worked at Marvel Studios for two years, and I work for them still, but it is like my extra job on the side. I do storyboards for them, primarily, although when I was working for them I designed many of their characters — the animation designs, that is — for the SPIDER-MAN AND HIS AMAZING FRIENDS show and the HULK show. I designed all of the animation on that.

SHEL: *Tell me some of the names of the characters?*

RICK: Well, all the major ones. The one I designed specifically for the show was Fire-Star, the female mutant character. But I also designed the Iceman character and the Aunt May character and all the major ones.

SHEL: *Aunt May was modeled after the comic-book Aunt May?*

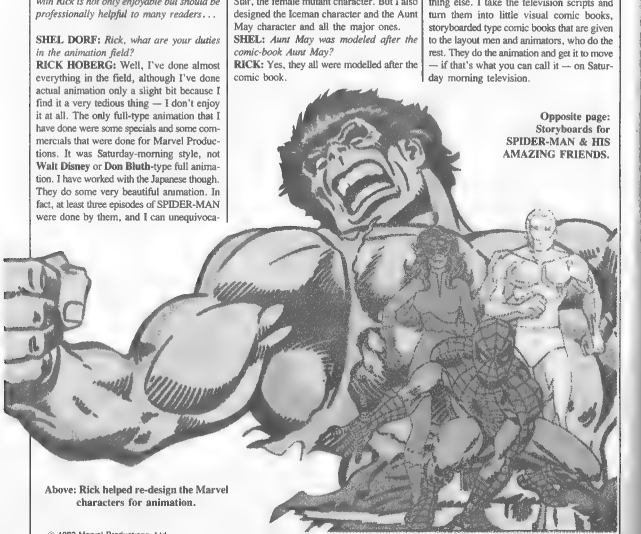
RICK: Yes, they all were modelled after the comic book.

SHEL: *How did you change them to suit animation from comic-book drawing?*

RICK: Mostly in simplyrfyng. But in some cases it takes more. Aunt May is one of those easy cases. You can take her and translate her almost verbatim to animation — she's what an animated character should be. There is a limit of lines to begin with. **Steve Ditko** is a natural at designing simple characters. Whereas Iceman — who is one of Marvel's mainstay characters — is very complicated-looking in the comics and we had to completely redesign him to where he looked like ice, but had nothing to do visually with the character in the comics. They don't have anything to do with each other visually. So I ended up finding a way to do Iceman as an animated character.

SHEL: *Then your job isn't really to do all of those hundreds of drawings moving arms and legs and...*

RICK: No, I do the story, more than anything else. I take the television scripts and turn them into little visual comic books, storyboarded type comic books that are given to the layout men and animators, who do the rest. They do the animation and get it to move — if that's what you can call it — on Saturday morning television.



Opposite page: Storyboards for SPIDER-MAN & HIS AMAZING FRIENDS.

Above: Rick helped re-design the Marvel characters for animation.

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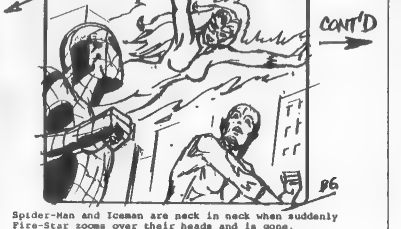
. . . I have always been a comics fan."

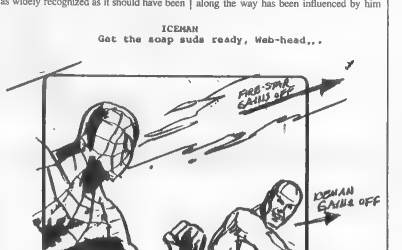
SHEL: *It is limited animation, isn't it?*
RICK: Extremely.
SHEL: *In these days when animators and artists are paid a lot better than they used to be, this is the economically feasible way to work, isn't it?*
RICK: Yes, it is, and they are finding ways to get around the limitations. The Japanese, who did those SPIDER-MAN episodes, have done some absolutely lovely animation for us. They have these Lupin features, which are so popular among the underground.
SHEL: *Can you explain that?*
RICK: It is LUPIN (pronounced Lu Pan). It is Lupin the third. Just like Richard III. He is a take-off on a 1920s and '30s pulp adventure hero from France, named Arsene Lupin...which, in fact, **Alfred Hitchcock** based TO CATCH A THIEF on. The Japanese Lupin is the third-generation grandson and an excellent hero. He is absolutely wonderful — it's like watching James Bond movies. They are so much fun. And the Japanese are putting a lot of that quality into what they are doing for us over here, too. In fact, I also worked on some G.I. JOE cartoons for syndication that are quite well done, too. They follow the comic book very closely.
SHEL: *Outside of animation, what have you been doing in the way of comics work?*
RICK: I started off at DC doing CAPTAIN CARROT back-ups and inking ALL-STAR COMICS while **Jerry Ordway** was taking a leave of absence. But since then I have done everything from GREEN LANTERN, which I inked a couple of issues of, to BATMAN. I've been pencilling, mostly — working with **Roy Thomas** on ALL-STAR SQUADRON for about a year and a half, as well as doing a little bit of JUSTICE LEAGUE work, plus the ANNUAL. And I recently did the SURGE mini-series for Eclipse Comics. Now I'm doing BATMAN regularly for DC.
SHEL: *Rick, when did you first become a comics fan?*
RICK: I have always been a comics fan. The first book that I remember reading was a TARZAN ANNUAL, much of it drawn by **Jesse Marsh**, which I treasured for years. I don't remember a time when I haven't enjoyed comics.
SHEL: *Did you sketch as a child, too?*
RICK: My dad used to draw these silly little cartoon-style drawings which I emulated. And after a while, my attention turned to a simpler style of comic art, particularly **Bob Kane**. I was really fascinated by **Bob Kane**, the real simplistic style, the 1950s BATMAN things. I just adored that stuff.
SHEL: *Do you have any formal background in art?*
RICK: Yes. I took the Famous Artists School by mail, and then I went on to take four years of college where I got my Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts at University of California at Irvine. But of course that wasn't oriented toward doing commercial art. After I got out of college, I started taking life-drawing classes, right after I met **Russ Manning.** In fact, he is the one who told me that I should learn that. The best drawing that you can do is always life drawing. All my best drawings have come out of those classes.
SHEL: *We miss Russ, don't we?*
RICK: Greatly. He was one of the most terrific artists in our field. His passing was not as widely recognized as it should have been by the people in this business. He really was one of the prime factors in comics when I was growing up.
SHEL: *He and Wally Wood died at about the same time and the accent in the fan press was more on Wally. I can remember talking to Russ in the hospital and telling him that Wally Wood had taken his own life and Russ said, "My God, what a waste!" And there was Russ in the hospital fighting for his own life. Your career was greatly influenced by Russ's help, wasn't it?*
RICK: Almost every facet of my career along the way has been influenced by him



Spider-Man and Iceman are neck in neck when suddenly Fire-Star zooms over their heads and is gone.

FIRE-STAR
Last one home gets to wash dishes!

ICEMAN
Get the soap suds ready, Web-head...



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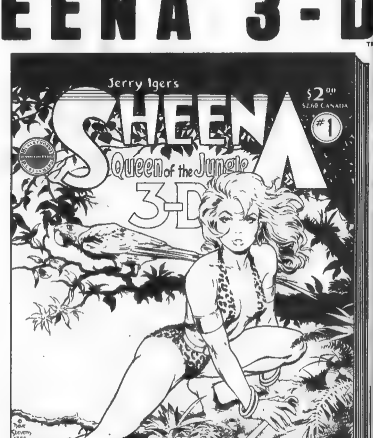

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"People mimick other artists. We all do."

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in one way or another. I remember specifically MAGNUS, ROBOT FIGHTER being a big influence on the stories that I wanted to tell and what I wanted to do with comics. His Tarzan stuff, of course, was great, but I actually preferred all of his original stuff. His Tarzan was the best adaptation that has ever been done of the character, in my opinion, and his STAR WARS strip was good, too — but his original stuff was just incredibly dynamic

SHEL: *When did you first meet Russ Manning?*

RICK: When I was President of the West Coast Comics Club — a small comic-book association in Orange County. Russ was a frequent visitor and knew **Gene Henderson** who was also one of the people running the club, and through him I got to meet Russ at an art show that I had set up for the club. He saw my work at the show and maybe a year or so later called and asked if I'd like to do some pencilling on TARZAN books for European distribution.

SHEL: *Was it a little frightening working for a man that you'd admired so much?*

RICK: It scared me to death. Luckily, I had another gentleman along with me, **Bill Wray** and Bill, I can honestly say, did all the talking — 'cause I could hardly speak. In fact, I remember the first couple of times that Russ called me concerning the assignments that we were working on — and I am not talking about deadline problems or anything — I could hardly speak to him. I would stutter and stuff. I was so impressed by **Russ Manning** that it was hard just in general to speak to the man.

SHEL: *But he had a way of relaxing people, didn't he? I don't think that I ever met a more down to earth, natural person.*

RICK: Russ got me going in the right direction. Russ would be very upfront. He told me that I would really have to draw within a certain period of time, and if I didn't understand that, he wouldn't be able to employ me anymore. Luckily, I made the grade.

SHEL: *This was all after you'd had life drawing and you'd been drawing for a while, right?*

RICK: He's the one who got me to take a lot of life-drawing classes. I would take two at a time, in fact, to keep up on it and get influence from as many other people as much as possible.

SHEL: *What did he see as lacking in your work?*

RICK: Realism of drawing, which is so hard for any young guy in the business to get. A lot of people mimick the other artists around them — we all try to mimick the people we like and we try to "keep up with" their quality when we each have our own quality to give along the way. Each of us does. And that is a hard thing to get around, it really is.

SHEL: *Mimicking, as opposed to understanding the figure from the skeleton right on up — the tendons and the muscles — perfectly?*

RICK: Right, because once you understand that, you can look at the old drawings that you used to admire so much, break them down and tear them apart in your mind and actually re-use them after all. Because all art is mimickery. There is a lot of originality in everything that everybody does — but we have all learned it over the thousands of years. The Greeks and the others have developed our impressions of what art is.

SHEL: *But when you mimick from art you may pick up somebody else's bad habits. The way I heard this best described is that if somebody is doing a drawing of Superman and notices that the figure has four lines on the side of his chest, they'll put in those four lines — because somebody else did it. But an artist who has had life drawing will know that those four lines are the shadows underneath the ribs and that there is a rib cage there and that the four lines are just a shadow of these ribs.*

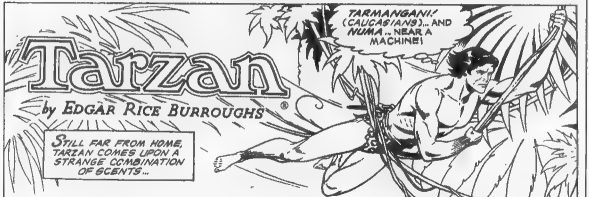
RICK: That's a big problem. Because if you just mimick somebody's style and their mood and things like that, you'll never really understand why you did what you did. You're just copying. It is almost like tracing

SHEL: *Isn't it an advantage in speed — being able to draw well and confidently and fast — to understand the figure?*

RICK: That is the most important. I am finding that now I am actually *drawing* whereas years ago I was just putting down lines as opposed to letting lines be a medium through which you portray shadows. Like you were saying, you don't want to just put those rendering lines on the side of a leg just because somebody else did it. You want to do it so that it makes your form look actually real to you. You are actually fooling yourself — you are creating something that isn't actually there.

SHEL: *When you were growing up, in your*

Above: MAGNUS, ROBOT FIGHTER by Russ Manning. Below: Panel from the first Manning Sunday TARZAN page.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by EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS
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TARMANGANI! (CAUCASIANS)... AND NUMA... NEAR A MACHINE!
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"Russ Manning was terrific."

young teenage years, had you really committed yourself to a comics career.

RICK: No. Not at all. It didn't come until the time that I met Russ, because I realized that this was the opportunity of my life. Here was the opportunity to do what I had always wanted, to draw comic books. So basically I quit my other job, working for my parents — which was not an easy thing to get away from, the family business — and just went into that.

SHEL: *I understand family business. My father was a candy manufacturer.*

RICK: My father was a jeweler and he did not — wasn't helpful at all in me leaving the business. My mother, on the other hand, was always helping me.

SHEL: *My father was also an artist. He gave me lettering lessons when I was a kid — which is ironic, because I hated lettering. I wanted to draw Mickey Mouse and all of those other things. He had once told me that even in the heart of the worst depression, lettering men had work, because businessmen needed "For Sale" signs painted or "Discount!" or "Going Out of Business" signs.*

RICK: *(Laughter.)*

SHEL: *Did you work next to Russ in his studio?*

RICK: Mostly, I worked at home, because I don't work well with somebody looking over my shoulder. I never have. But we did work together quite a few times due to deadline problems — especially on STAR WARS. We'd be passing pages back and forth, since Russ had specific things that he wanted to do himself. Not things I couldn't do, but special touches that said, "**Russ Manning**". As you know, an artist signatures his strip by inking close-ups and various other things which are his "signature." You don't really need to sign it after you've signatured it like that. Let's say that he would do a face and then I would end up finishing the hair and the costuming on the shoulders and everything.

SHEL: *This is fascinating. I don't think that any of this has been talked about yet.*

RICK: He really knew how to signature his work. He was really good at that. He knew just what I should be doing as opposed to what he should be doing.

SHEL: *It was a terrific grind and a terrific deadline pressure for him.*

RICK: He was a good man to work for, but a hard taskmaster, also — no doubt about that.

SHEL: *Why do you say that?*

RICK: He insisted on a certain thing and if he didn't get it he would make sure you got it to him. Once or twice I came back with something for him that he just didn't like at all, and he would take an electric eraser to it and just completely wipe out hours of work

Master artist Russ Manning. "Almost every facet of my career has been influenced by him in one way or another," says Rick.

right there in front of me and insist that I redo it. That is a real hard thing to face.

SHEL: *Did you pursue other work during your time with Russ — what did you do after he died?*

RICK: Well, before Russ passed on, I mosied into animation, which has actually made me a very lucrative living, because it doesn't have too many guys who are oriented toward storytelling *per se*. Although you have a thousand guys in the animation industry, most don't know anything about story. There is only a handful who really know story, which I consider my best subject. I got into that and have made most of my living doing animation work specifically for Hanna-Barbera, and more than anything, Marvel Productions. Russ and I never really parted ways. I was let-go by the Lucas Organization, but it got to the point where Lucas Film couldn't spend the money, because they were paying the two of us probably together more than many people are getting basically for strip work — a lot of money, I want to tell you. And I think that Russ had already informed him that he was planning on leaving, anyway.

SHEL: *At this time, he was sick and the strain of the job — he just didn't have the energy for it.*

RICK: He was sick for most of the run of STAR WARS. I don't know how many people knew that. Many times we would have to work together real fast at the very end of the week to get everything done, because he would be ill for a couple of days and unable to do anything.

SHEL: *He was one of the greats and will be missed.*

RICK: That is for sure, especially in my book.

SHEL: *Rick, tell me about the type of portfolio you showed when you went around trying to get work at the animation studios.*

RICK: The comics work. They loved it — they absolutely loved it. They have so few people who can tell a story like that, espe-

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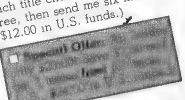

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"I don't think there is anybody who teaches

cially in Saturday morning animation. So many are not doing good drawing to begin with — they can move a form on the screen, but they don't really understand the muscle structure or that there are things under it — so the drawing is very weak in the business in general.

SHEL: *So you won animation work by showing your comic-book pages?*

RICK: Comic-book work and fantasy illustration, almost exclusively. In fact, do you know that they laugh at commercial designers in many cases? After I was well-established in the business, there were times I'd be called in to look over somebody's portfolio, and later we'd laugh because we knew exactly what school they'd come from, what assignments they'd been given, and so forth and so on. The "Art Center" is one that a lot of people go to but is not real well-respected in my industry.

SHEL: *It is very prestigious in the advertising industry.*

RICK: I know, but it doesn't mean that they can draw.

SHEL: *I was accepted by "Art Center" in the '50s. I came out from Detroit and lasted two weeks. I couldn't get a nighttime job to support me, so I had to give it up and go back.*

RICK: It was a real prestigious school in those days. From about 1965 on, they've just been cranking out people. But as to animation, the thing is that you have to know real good drawing, and also the storytelling aspect of it. That is the whole thing in animation, in my opinion.

SHEL: *Where did you learn to tell a good story?*

RICK: Well, Russ helped me a lot, but I've really got to say that **Roy Thomas** and **Doug Wildey** are my two biggest influences — Doug, especially. He led me by the hand, teaching me storyboards and animation. He taught me what has literally turned into the best part of my career. And once I started doing storyboards, story process actually fell into line, and that is how I got to be a much better comic artist. I can tell a better story now.

SHEL: *Can you give me a brief example as to what Doug would tell you to advance a story?*

RICK: Well, concepts developed while you are telling stories are not specific lessons, in many cases. Storytelling is a thing that you develop as you go along . It is part of illustration and art. It is just a personal thing. I don't think that there is anybody who teaches storytelling. Doug more or less just gave me a realization of what I was doing and what I should be doing, rather than portraying pretty pictures to evoke my own emotions — which happens a lot in comics.

SHEL: *It is important to you, isn't it? Storytelling.*

RICK: I am more interested in the storytelling than anything else.

SHEL: *You mentioned Roy Thomas as a strong influence. What did he teach you in the way of telling stories?*

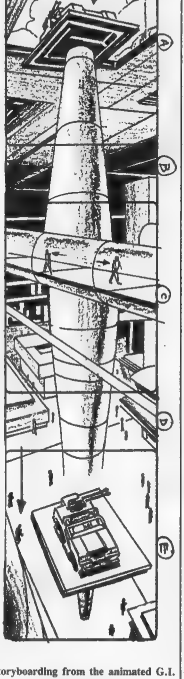
RICK: Roy gave me a lot of good opportunities to tell stories. **Russ Manning** always worked from full script. When we did TARZAN we did full script — the lettering was always put down first and the drawings were worked around it. When I went to Marvel, I learned from Roy the "Marvel Method" which is now used extensively throughout all of the comics industry and even in other related areas, like strips and things. The storytelling is done by a penciller first and then the dialoguing is fitted to the storytelling — which is actually to me a much more intelligent way of working. I found that I was forced to tell the story. I had to make sure what the characters were doing was consistent from one panel to the next and Roy would sit me down and tell me things that I wasn't doing, even artistically. He would point out foreground and background elements — how they worked as opposed to one another. He is very observant that way. Roy and **Mark Evanier** have a great art sense when it comes to this business.

SHEL: *Okay, say you're sitting at the board with a blank piece of art paper in front of you and a typewritten page. What is on the page of a comic-book plot?*

RICK: The written page has a basic description of the sequence of the story, that is the action that will happen. But the details as to how that will happen, the staging of it, how each character reacts, facially and bodily — the body language involved — that is all up to me. In contrast, full scripts are completely written out and call for a specific way of seeing it. They even call for the angles — your upshots, your downshots, various things like that. These days much of the storytelling that I do comes right from myself.

SHEL: *Now, why is this way superior to having the dialogue written out first, and then matching the pictures to the dialogue?*

RICK: I don't mind matching the pictures to the dialogue in many cases — what I ob-



Storyboarding from the animated G.I. JOE syndicated TV series.

VERTICAL PAN (A) TO (B): HOLD ON JEEP AS PLATFORM LOWERS IT TO APOINT WHERE JEEP IS SEEN TO PAN DOWN AHEAD OF IT AND HOLD (FIG. E) ON VAST UNDERGROUND MILITARY COMPLEX. AS JEEP ON PLATFORM ENTER TO CONTINUE CAMERA.

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storytelling. It's a thing you develop."

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GOT HIM-! YOU ALL RIGHT, KID? THAT WAS SOME SWING-!
I'M OKAY, HAN, BUT WE'VE GOT TO GET AWAY FROM HERE! A MOB OF SANDIES IS COMING—
...TO KILL ALL SMART ONES...
...IN REVENGE FOR BOBA FETT BLASTING TWO OF THEM-!
HAH! WE'LL STAND RIGHT HERE, LUKE... AND TRY A LITTLE REVERSE JUSTICE-!
WE'LL TURN THIS BOUNTY HUNTER OVER TO BONTORE WHO WANTS HIM!

This page: The STARS WARS strip after Manning. Pencils: Rick Hoberg. Inks: Dave Stevens of ROCKETEER.

ject to is having to visualize some other guy's idea of *how* to tell the story. It is his interpretations that will bother me — like calling for a longshot where I feel a longshot is completely arbitrary and unneeded, and maybe this is really the place to put the close-up in. I love working with a good plot, but when the writer begins to insinuate too much of his own visuals into it, that is when I begin to get stifled.

SHEL: *One of my pet peeves is when the artist will make every page a climax scene whereas the pacing doesn't require it. The spectacular approach of the artist, to me, gets in the way of storytelling. I feel that a good artist will give less to make the story be more. Do you agree with that?*

RICK: Always. In fact, you'll find the same is true in all the best films. I base a lot of my work on the visuals in films — of course, I don't pace it like a film, and I don't try to compose it like a film, because you can't do that in comics. As far as storytelling is concerned, you should always give only the information the reader needs to tell the story. Once you start getting verbose about it visually, you are actually defeating your own purpose.

SHEL: *How do you approach a comic-book page from an artist's standpoint?*

RICK: You've got to be able to move the reader's eye around the page. You've got to make simple designs. Mostly, I use letters — which is a real old trick. I take something out of the alphabet — a "Z" or an "A" or anything like that — and I just make the page flow like that. It is a great old trick. And it always works. All the guys that I know of do that. One time I overheard **Neal Adams** at a San Diego Con talking to **Joe Orlando** about a page that somebody had been working on. One of them kind of ran his hand over it in a "Z" shape and you knew that he was talking about the graphic design.

SHEL: *Do you do little thumbnail sketches of your artwork before you go to the large piece of paper?*

RICK: Quite often, I won't do a thumbnail of the page. Sometimes I use storyboard paper — on which all the the panels are the same size like a television screen — and I will story it out so that I know basically what the elements are, which ones can be featured better than others. And then I'll do the comic page. But the design of the page, and where the actual elements that I've already established will be, all happens as the page is coming out of me. I kind of let composition flow out of me that way.

SHEL: *What do you require of a good inker?*

RICK: To follow the drawing, that's the most important thing to me. When I'm inking something, I appreciate a terrific layout. But I think that the actual finished drawing is the most important — to actually draw it. Not to just trace down what's there and/or just fill-in blacks, which many guys do. An inker should put a lot of drawing into it. The epitome of good inking is **John Severin, Wally Wood**. They really drew that stuff, it looked real when they were done with it. Your actual drawing is much different in pencil than it is in ink. Funny, but there is a world of difference in what you put down in pencil and how it looks finished in ink.

SHEL: *What would you suggest as a study course for an inker?*

RICK: Well, inking is one of those funny things that is really specialized these days, they don't even have it in any other business. Inking is strictly in the comic-book business these days. If you do a drawing in animation, that is no longer inked — it is Xeroxed these days. The only drawings that are inked now days are the cel drawings that they have on the trailers of the commercials on Saturday mornings, things like that. Even **Disney, Bluth**, all the big animation studios, none of them use anything but Xeroxing. And so I think that inking — training somebody to actually ink — would be like fine line painting more than anything else.

SHEL: *What is your day to day routine like?*

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COMING SOON!

"Many guys worry about the artistic quality of their work. That is a big mistake."

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RICK: It is a pretty simple work routine. I get up in the morning with my wife, and I do chores and stuff around the house before I get to work. That is usually seven or so. I get up between six and seven. I get to work no later than eight in the morning and I work at least until six in the afternoon, with maybe an hour and a half off during the day. Sometimes I work at night, but I generally enjoy the day work. I keep in contact with people then.

SHEL: *How many hours a week do you put in drawing comics?*

RICK: That really varies. Sometimes I do twenty hours a week and sometimes I do forty. Sometimes I do sixty. It is a regular work-job with the comics now. I plan it as my primary load of work.

SHEL: *What is good production for you?*

RICK: A good day's work is two-and-a-half pencilled pages — which is real hard to maintain a lot of the time, because of the extra projects which are always hanging on your shoulders. With me it is storyboards which are always hanging — sometimes I have to apportion hours, six or eight hours for comics and two or three hours on storyboards, and call it a day at that.

SHEL: *How about your time — have you been able to cut your time down? Because I know that this has always been a problem to young artists who get into the business. They are just not fast enough to work commercially and beat those deadlines. I've heard Jack Kirby describe certain people and say that they need some time in the pressure cooker — the pressure cooker being tight deadlines — so that they really have to produce under pressure. Did you go through this period?*

RICK: Yes. You should go through it. You have to if you are ever going to make it in the business. It is very neccessary. You have to know what the deadline is. The deadline can sometimes make you produce the work. I don't know how many guys I know that sit around and worry about the artistic quality of their work and then so they never end up doing the work, because they are so afraid that it isn't going to be some great artistic endeavor. That is a big mistake, because the only way that you get good at drawing is by drawing all of the time. Don't hack it out, if you can posibly avoid it. Sometimes it seems unavoidable. But do the best you can and you get better.

SHEL: *You just came from an animation studio before this interview. Would you like to tell a little bit more about your interest in animation?*

RICK: Well, my interest in animation grows

Lancer, from the Evanier/Hoberg SURGE mini-series, published by Eclipse.

business, so based on this I was able to judge what was good and what was bad. And in the six or seven years since I have been in the business I can say that we have moved tremendously forward specifically in the area of Saturday morning. We've got shows on daily. I have to say that when I got into the business, animation was at its lowest ebb in television. And I started working on a show called GODZILLA, which was really terrible. I got to see what you would call the lowest of the low in production values in my

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"Robots have been a real boon."

now that are really what I would call fairly quality programming. MIGHTY ORBOTS is my particular pick, because it is a really terrific show, it is really terrific television. It's got excellent animation, terrific stories, great characters and the music and everything that goes along with that show are quality. And the show itself is not based on gimmicks, it is based on character. The robot characters are the most interesting part of the show. There are a lot of fantastic things happening — but when you get right down to it, it's the characters that really make it. They are real. In fact, we've got five robots that are more real than most of the people we've got on Saturday morning. I shouldn't say we — I am not really part of the team. I just boarded on a few of the episodes.

SHEL: *Robots are really coming into the mainstream of popularity, I would say. I just saw an article yesterday in VARIETY that George Lucas is planning an animated television show based on the further adventures of R2-D2 and C-3PO.*

RICK: Robots have just been a real boon because there is so much merchandising that can be done around them. Most of them are actually spin-offs of merchandising — such as THE TRANSFORMERS and GO-BOTS — as opposed to the MIGHTY ORBOTS which was strictly conceived for television.

SHEL: *Why do you think that robots are so popular now?*

RICK: Right now they are popular because we have an integration of man and machine happening so fast in our society. You know that man and computer terminal are pretty much man and robot talking to each other. Most of the robots are humanoid in design. And when you get down to it, what you have is a combination of a man controlling a creature which is exactly like himself, made of metal. I shouldn't say himself — I should say that it is a great caricature of himself. These robots are like our pyschic extensions of what we hope the computer will be.

SHEL: *I think that the more loveable ones definitely have personalities of man. When I first heard C-3PO's voice, I conjured up Edward Everett Horton as kind of the slightly screwy effeminate butler type.*

RICK: You got it. Right. All of them are human. The ones that aren't human, aren't popular. R2-D2 is as human as he can be. All he is is a little can — but everything that he says has a human emotion backing it. It may just be a sound such as *(sings)* whoop, whoop, whoop, whoop. But it has something that relates to what we said. I think the Orbots are popular just for that reason.

SHEL: *At one point, I remember that you went to Korea as an animator. Tell me a little about it.*

RICK: That was an opportunity I had to be

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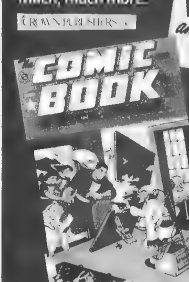

This year's feature is on C.C. Beck, the original illustrator for Captain Marvel. Complete, precise, and up-to-date, this is the most respected and comprehensive book in its field and a must for comic book collectors. Over 70,000 price listings, plus more than 1,200 illustrations. "The 'bible' in the field."
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"Network execs have no idea what animation

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"I openly admit that ALL-STAR was a problem, because of the size of the cast." No kidding!

a director, which I desperately wanted — to have a little authority over this stuff, since I find that the biggest problem in the Saturday morning animation business is the lack of anyone wanting to take authority. It brings up deadline problems once again. Responsibility is something that people sluff off in this business. They like to let the bad animation go by, if they can possibly let it. What has to get done, has to get done, in some cases. We're fighting it all of the time. In fact, I heard a network exec say that their biggest problem with the Saturday morning animation is that they don't have enough time to make decisions on it. That is laughable. They have no idea what it takes to make an animated film. They think it is like doing a sitcom. You just get the actors in front of the cameras and shoot it and it's ready for you three weeks later. Doesn't happen. It takes seven months to do a show.

SHEL: *That was my next question.*

RICK: It takes seven months to produce one show. Twenty-three minutes, exactly.

SHEL: *Seven months to produce twenty-three minutes of animated cartoon?*

RICK: Of the first one, yeah. It takes a long time. Actually, you'd get much better product if they would give us *more* time — much better product.

SHEL: *And when these things are finished and shown on the network, do you have a royalty arrangement where every time this cartoon is shown you get a certain percentage of it?*

RICK: No, not in Saturday morning animation, because the basic personnel is so highly paid to begin with. It is not like comics, where you work and sweat and they are giving residuals — you know that you've worked for something. In animation, you can do the regular forty hours a week and make two or three times what you do in comic books and, like most jobs, maybe ten out of those forty hours, you can just be sluffing off.

SHEL: *How much does an animator earn per week?*

RICK: They start at about $235 per week, I think it's the lowest salary in the business, and it goes up from there — a good animator can make $800 to $900 per week, and during the busy season, more than that.

SHEL: *Is it unionized?*

RICK: Yes. That is the biggest problem — the cartoonist union. I came in at a time when you didn't have to work your way up. I came in and did layout immediately, with no animation experience, and then **Doug Wildey** took a fancy to my stuff and taught me storyboards. The only reason that I ever did any animation to begin with was to prove to other people that I could do it. So they would respect me. And I did it. I went home and animated a whole sequence out of a show and never heard anything about it since then. It proved that I know.

SHEL: *You proved it to yourself, too.*

RICK: Yes. Although I knew that I could. If you can do the storyboards, you can almost certainly do the animation. If you can tell the story and know where those movements are going to happen in space to begin with, it isn't really hard.

SHEL: *How did you get to Korea?*

RICK: Well, they flew me. *(Laughter.)* No, just kidding. I ended up being one of the people who knew enough about the Marvel Universe to more or less control the product and give them what they wanted.

SHEL: *Why did they set up a Marvel studio in Korea in the first place?*

RICK: It wasn't a Marvel studio. It is owned by a Korean gentlemen over there who does a lot of work for Hanna-Barbera and Ruby-Spears. The reason he fell into doing comics stuff is because his company produced the THUNDARR series. Which was so terrific, really excellent. Another one that I worked on. I was lucky enough to get onto that. A real good project. I am really proud of THUNDARR.

SHEL: *What is this fellow's name that owns this animation studio?*

takes. They think it's like doing a sitcom."

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A phenomenal four-page spread from ALL-STAR SQUADRON #31. Art by Rick, words by Roy Thomas.

RICK: His name is **Steven Hahn.** He is an American. He is of Korean descent. And these people do some excellent work.

SHEL: *Had you been in the Orient before?*

RICK: No. Never. It was wonderful.

SHEL: *How long were you there all told?*

RICK: Two-and-one-half months. I lived out of the nicest hotel in the city. It was a lovely experience and you get to see how other people work and you realize how universal what we're doing really is.

SHEL: *What was your job?*

RICK: I was overseeing director on the animation.

SHEL: *Did you train the Korean animation artists?*

RICK: I did some things like give life-drawing classes to some of the animators who weren't well-oriented with this material, who maybe do the cartoon stuff better. We tried to orient them to what Marvel was all about, more than to animation, because they already knew animation. What they needed to know is how the human body works and how Marvel-type material works. That is what we were trying to put into the show, more than anything — the Marvel style. I think that we've done a good job. I was real proud of most of the stuff.

SHEL: *What is your barometer of what a good job is? Is it the letters you receive from the viewers? Or what?*

RICK: In some cases. But in most cases, it is the ratings and how the network receives it. SPIDER-MAN was very well received. It looks like it is going to go on for quite a few years. That is a real feather in the cap of Marvel Productions — they bought **DePatie-Freleng** out, which had not had a show in more than fifteen years that went more than one season until SPIDER-MAN. I think that myself, **Will Meugniot, Larry Houston** and three or four others guys, **Dick Sebast** among them, really made those shows what they were.

SHEL: *It is a lot to be proud of. Rick, getting back to comics, tell me how you got the BATMAN book. That was quite a coup.*

RICK: To be honest, I know that there were other negotiations. I realize that they had been trying to deal with **Frank Miller** for a long time. **Miller** and **Gerber** were contracted by DC to come up with a whole new visualization of the whole line — all of the line, starting with SUPERMAN to BATMAN, and they'd have a real "top of the line" team working on a basic concept to visualize these characters in a logical way, rather than the haphazardness that has happened to the characters at DC over the last twenty years. Now that is being fixed up by the CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS series by **George Perez** and **Marv Wolfman**. And I think that **Miller** and the others have no interest in doing BATMAN. So I was a logical choice. It's perfect for me. It is something where I don't have to deal with a huge cast — I openly admit that ALL-STAR was a problem, because of the size of the cast. And the people in BATMAN are tremendously well-established characters — such as Bruce Wayne, Batman, Alfred, Commissioner Gordon. These are all characters who tell their own story. They are real to me, so it is not hard to visualize.

SHEL: *I grew up reading BATMAN and am old enough to say that I bought it off the newsstand and read it regularly right from the first issue. Over the years, BATMAN has changed — but from force of habit, when I visit a comic book store, I still come home with a copy. There have been several interpretations of BATMAN through the years and I was wondering if you have a favorite?*

RICK: I think that I have quite a few favorites. My own version is literally the jelling of the fun — I hate to use "lighthearted-ness," let's say the bizarreness — of the **Jerry Robinson** BATMAN, with all those giant objects and those strange situations Batman would find himself in. They were always fun to me — and I am not talking

"At Marvel, in particular, their sense

"camp" by any means. I am talking something that is completely out of the ordinary. But then again that is the primary role of storytelling. **Hitchcock**'s method was to take the ordinary person and put him in extraordinary circumstances. It creates its own good storytelling. Well, Batman is just an ordinary guy, really, and when you put him in these extraordinary circumstances, he becomes fascinating.

SHEL: *Interesting that you should mention Hitchcock because when I first saw the scene across the face of Mount Rushmore in NORTH BY NORTHWEST...*

RICK: Great example.

SHEL: *...I thought of Batman. Huge, larger than life figures and the action.*

RICK: I bet that is why I was drawn to that movie, myself, now that I think back on it. It is one of my very favorite movies. It is a nonsense movie, condensed — strictly a chase movie — and it doesn't have any meaning when you get to the end. Yet it is one of the best movies ever made. No doubt about that! And it is exactly the kind of thing that I would like to do in Batman. Bruce Wayne — we still don't know too much about Bruce Wayne. I have a hunch that there is more depth to Bruce Wayne than we see. Frankly, I don't see how he finds the time to be both people. That is something that I am definitely going to put my mind to — that Batman and Bruce Wayne are the same person. You are not going to see a difference between these two characters. I have definitely thought about hand mannerisms they will both be using and things like that, which will bring them closer together as one person. There was always this thing of Bruce Wayne as one guy and Batman as this other guy. They are a world apart sometimes. They don't seem like the same person.

SHEL: *Rick, you are a sensitive, intelligent person. What is your frank overview of the current comic book — what you see on the stands when you go into a comic-book store?*

RICK: Well, it is a love-hate relationship at best. It is wonderful to see the amount of comics coming out now and the creativity — and then, on the other hand, we have a tremendous lack of talent in other areas, which is sad. Here I go, stepping on toes — I think that at Marvel, in particular, their sense of artwork has really gone downhill. I've seen things — and I admit that there are some in the books published by the company that I work for too — that just, you wouldn't print it as a comic book, ten years ago. They wouldn't allow it in the slightest. It isn't strong enough material. On the other hand, many of the new people who have come in are just terrific. So like I said, it is a love-hate relationship. Most of the "creative" things happening in the "alternative" comic-book companies are not creative in the slightest and in fact are repetitive. It was sad, to me, to see a company like Pacific publish a line of comic books trying to emulate EC, and EC died twenty-five years ago. Give me a break! We don't need it again. It is nice to see somebody appreciated, but it is a different time and place and you just can't fall back — you have got to go forward.

SHEL: *I read a guest editorial a while back in the BUYER'S GUIDE. To the best of my recollection the person who wrote it was John Byrne — but his point was there is a real responsibility not to buy a comic, if it is bad.*

Below: Storyboard from the G.I. JOE animated TV show. Opposite page: from BATMAN #380.

MEUGNIOT/HOBERG
HOUSTON
G.I. JOE
A REAL AMERICAN HERO!
Page 4
Prod. 2
STOP
START PAN
CONT
WHAM!-- COBRA MACHINE NEST IN FRONT OF BUFFEL TOWARDS...
GRAND SLAM, INTO BG, THEN PAN UP SCARLETT, BREAKER, AND FLASH (COBRA ESCAPE CRAFT THRU IN BG...)
is there
CONT
CONT
SUDDENLY, COBRA GUARDS ARE PULLED BEHIND SAND BAGS...
COBRA FLAG LOWERS AS G.I. JOE FLAG RAISES...
STALKER AND SNAKE EYES RISE FROM BEHIND SAND BAGS, GIVE ONE ANOTHER VICTORIOUS "HIGH SIGN" AND RUN O.S.
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# of artwork has really gone downhill."

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The only way to tell the people in charge that a comic is lousy is to not buy it, he said, but the comic-book fan often wants a complete run of issue #1 - #100 or whatever and will buy the bad stuff as well as the good.

RICK: I agree completely with what he says, but it is a limited point of view for certain reasons. One reason is that what he likes is not what every person likes. Every human being is entitled to his own decision as to what is good and what is bad, and just because I don't like something doesn't make it bad — he may have an appreciation of it that I am not looking at. But there is another factor. You have a man talking here about something like this, who is one of the primary exponents of a company that last year flooded the markets to try to destroy the other smaller companies. He is the man producing this material and at the same time he is saying that other people shouldn't buy bad material. It is absolutely absurd that he should be an exponent of something like that.

SHEL: *Good point. Okay, Rick, you have the floor. Do you feel there is something that you want to tell the reader?*

RICK: Well, actually, I think my responsibility doesn't lie so much in the area of moralizing as it does in the area of entertainment. When it comes right down to it, I should worry less about myself being noticed as the artist than I should how much a kid got out of this comic book in enjoyment value. I am not talking purient enjoyment such as fistfights from the beginning to the end. That is really negligible excitement, because it is easy to excite someone with fights. You can excite a dog with another dogfight down the street, so there is really no big problem there. But if a person can read a story which is not insulting their intelligence, which is not violent but still entertaining, that is what I am aiming for. One thing that we shouldn't be doing is shoving art down children's throats, telling them what is good and what is bad art, as so many of the comic-art reviewers and spokesmen talk about these days. I think it is more important to do a good issue of BATMAN or SUPERMAN that a lot of children are going to read than it is to do an "important" work like RONIN, when it gets right down to it. That is more for the artist than it is for the readers. We are in a medium that is more for the readers than it is for the artist. I don't think that any of the really good movie makers go out of their way to make a movie for themselves, anymore — they do it for the audience and for a mass-appeal of sorts.

SHEL: *Does it bother you that the majority of people that will buy your BATMAN comic read it and throw it away — or trade it off to another comic-book fan?*

RICK: A lot of artwork is dispensible. I do appreciate that there are a lot of people out there who keep these and like them a lot. And I know for a fact that there will always be that kid out there, who will pick out that one particular issue that you worked on, and it will live with him for the rest of his life, as so many have done with me.

AND IN A DEAD-END!
I USE THE TRAIL OF NIGHT FLOWERS TO FOOD PACK, WHAT ABOUT THIS ANIMAL? IS THE ONLY WAY TO EXPLAIN HIS TONGUE-MARKINGS INTO THIN AIR?
THE END
DOUG MOENCH | RICK HOBERG & ALFREDO ALCALA | BEN ODA | LETTERER | LEN WEIN
WRITER | ARTISTS | A DIFFERENT ROY MUCH? | EDITOR

SHEL: *Good answer. One last question, Rick. What would you like to be doing ten years from now?*

RICK: Geez. Here I am doing what I want to be doing and he asks me what I want to do ten years from now! I will stick with BATMAN or SUPERMAN for a long run, no doubt about that. I haven't had a chance to do a long run on a comic book. Other than that, I would like to work on one really really good television or movie project of my own, and I want to continue to create stuff like SURGE with **Mark Evanier**, because I think that there is a real well of interesting things coming out of him and me all of a sudden.

SHEL: *Let me ask you a second last question. What were you doing ten years ago?*

RICK: I was just starting to draw comic books with **Russ Manning**. In fact, this is the anniversary of the first year that Russ employed me to draw TARZAN. And I can honestly say that drawing TARZAN was such a dream come true that I wasn't thinking that far ahead back then — but I was probably hoping to do BATMAN one way

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"My computer-aided design program helps the artist speed up his work."

At one end of the technological spectrum is Mike Saenz — at the other, Jon King. Both are in the forefront of the computer revolution in comics, and in Jon's case he's developing and defining some of the new tools — software — that may someday become as commonplace in comics as the brush and pen are today.

Himself no stranger to computers or comics, Alan Goldstein paid a visit to Jon's studio in Newfane, Vermont, to "interface" for the following interview and open a "window" on what's to come...

ALAN GOLDSTEIN: *For starters, how would you define the software you've developed — THE COMIC ART CREATOR — a computer-aided design program, right?*

JON KING: Well, I think it might be helpful to anyone not familiar with computers to describe the different types of graphics programs available. There are two basic types: the computer-generated image and the computer-aided design. My program is the computer-aided design, where it's not generating the final artwork, but helps the artist produce and speed up his work... as opposed to what **Mike Saenz** is doing, for instance, on SHATTER. Every other industry that I can think of has gone to CAD systems — I really can't think of one, besides comics, that hasn't.

ALAN: *I was just reading an article this morning about design help for business applications.*

JON: Right. Architects and engineers and automotive designers — all kinds of artists — use it, except comics artists. It's designed to speed up and make the perspective transformations of each panel more accurate. A lot of creating a comic-book page is drudge work... in my opinion. Drawing construction lines is just plain boring. So this is designed to do it for you. You print out your panel and use your light table and you start drawing, doing the fun part right away. It's 100% accurate. You can change your field of view... the angle of the "camera." It can even be used by writers.

ALAN: *How?*

JON: Well, for instance, I know that **Jim Shooter** will sometimes do sort-of stick figure breakdowns and hand them off to an artist. This will give the writer a lot more control over that process. In fact, the writer can become more of a cinematographer.

ALAN: *So he's actually doing the layouts?*

JON: He's shooting it — it's like having a camera and shooting construction lines — whatever camera angle or body position or set of proportions. That's what it's designed

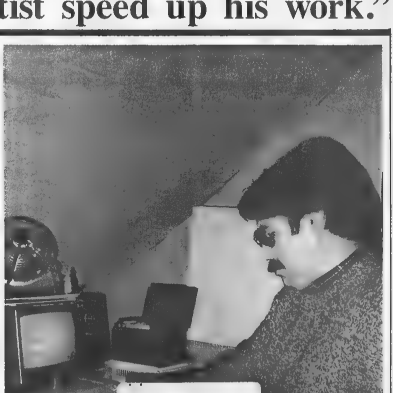


Photo: Dave King

JON KING

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Jon King.
Born: Rochester, NY.
Occupation: Software Engineer; budding comic-book artist.
Previous Occupations: Musician, Silk Screener, Carousel Restorer, Toy Manufacturer.
Training: Numerous private drawing lessons in youth; Degree, Studio Art, from Windham College in Putney, VT; DC Artists Workshop.
Favorite Food: Joe Weider's Dynamic Muscle Builder.
Least Favorite Food: Disney World's "Geppetto-Burger."
Favorite Quote: *(From economist Peter Drucker):* "Expand or die."

"I suspect people are going to get upset

to do. Of course, being an artist, I wrote it from the artist's viewpoint. For instance, you can adjust the vanishing point to get just the right composition. And in the artist's terms, not in some strange computer jargon.

ALAN: *You just showed me a building that you constructed in less than... probably, two minutes.*

JON: Right.

ALAN: *It consisted of a cube, a cylinder and a pyramid. And then you moved the cylinder to the top of it and rotated all the way around it... uh... and got it to tilt and pan and zoom.*

JON: Right.

ALAN: *Well, that's pretty powerful!*

JON: Yeah. And it's for a 64K computer — you don't find too many CAD systems for a 64K.

ALAN: *The system that you're using is — ?*

JON: It's a 64K Apple IIe with one disk drive, a grappler plus interface card, and an Epson RX-80 dot-matrix printer. But you can choose a wide variety of printers. I chose that one because it's cheap and it works and that's all I care about. In general, my approach has been to make the program cheap enough and available enough so that anyone could use it.

ALAN: *So dollar-wise we're talking about?*

JON: I just saw the IIe advertised for under $800, and the printer was around $250.

ALAN: *About a thousand or so total?*

JON: Around there. But the Apple series of computers are everywhere... schools, colleges.

ALAN: *Even the Brattleboro library has one.*

JON: Yup. So you don't have to buy one. Plus, the Apple IIe is a great machine, so if you *do* actually buy one, you can do all kinds of things with it. You can even get the UNIX operating system with the C language for it, which is what **George Lucas** uses for his stuff. You can really get into it.

ALAN: *I've heard stories — I don't know if they're true or not — about artists who make rubber stamps of standard poses and just touch them up... is this an extension of that approach? Could anyone do it?*

JON: Keep in mind that a bad drawing can be done in perfect perspective just as easily as a good one!

ALAN: *So you still have to be a good artist?*

JON: Absolutely. I mean, this is designed as a tool for professionals or aspiring professionals. One of the advantages of this tool is that it expands your design capabilities by allowing you to experiment with a lot of compositions in the time it used to take to do one. Actually, if I wanted to get extreme about things, I could quantify the elements of composition and develop a sub-routine that would check each panel as it was created and automatically correct it, even using a random selector to assure variety, but I don't think I want to get into that.

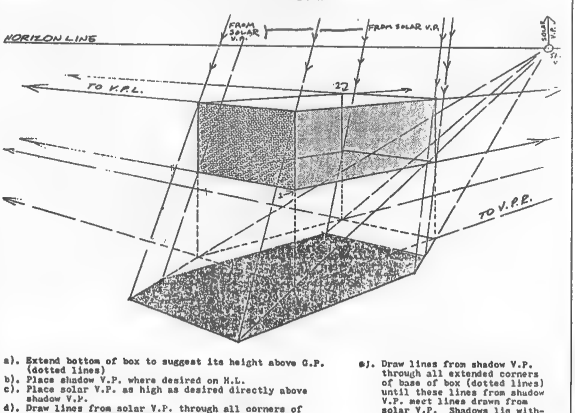
ALAN: *Why not?*

JON: You gotta draw the line somewhere!

ALAN: *You've got three modules, or programs. What exactly do they do?*

JON: They're called "A," "B," and "C." The first one creates objects and settings; the second one creates anatomical models that you can position or set to any set of proportions; and the third one brings it all together, so that you can move around 3-D space and take "pictures." There's also another function. In case you don't have a print-buffer, you can create binary picture files and store the entire comic on disk.

"This is the stuff I got from Sal Amendola... here's what you do to cast a shadow. With my program it takes about ten seconds."(See facing page.)



a). Extend bottom of box to suggest its height above G.P. (dotted lines)
b). Place shadow V.P. where desired on H.L.
c). Place solar V.P. as high as desired directly above shadow V.P.
d). Draw lines from solar V.P. through all corners of the box (except corners "1" & "2"), extending lines well into G.P.
e). Draw lines from shadow V.P. through all extended corners of base of box (dotted lines) until these lines from shadow V.P. meet lines drawn from solar V.P. Shadows lie within all the intersected points.

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. . . purists who see this as threatening."

Then, with a short program that I supply, you can feed these pictures to the printer while you do something else — or mail the stuff to your artist or editor, or feed it into a phone modem or whatever.

ALAN: *I suppose this is what a writer or penciller or layout artist of the future might be doing, then sending it over the phone?*

JON: Well, the bottom line is how much money this will save in the production of comics, either for the publisher or the creator. If it does, you'll see it around. If it doesn't, you won't

ALAN: *So you think we'll see a freeze in the price of comics? I wouldn't hold my breath.*

JON: Well, no. But what you may see is a smaller company installing a system like this, maybe licensing out equipment to its creators . . . cutting production costs, increasing output, and becoming more competitive in the market.

ALAN: *How much time do you think can be saved, say, in pencilling?*

JON: I've doubled my output. I think I could do better than that, but at this point, that's about it.

ALAN: *Well, that's . . . incredible, really.*

JON: It's not bad. Of course, I might be really slow with my construction lines or something. But you'll save time no matter what your level.

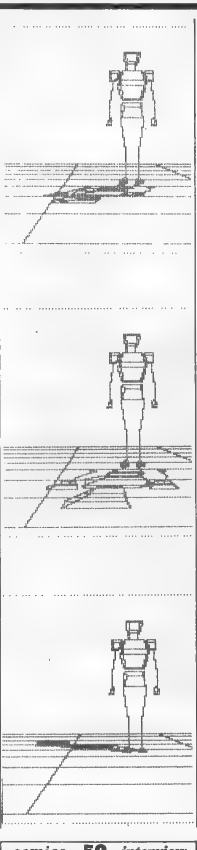
Of course, there are other implications here. For example, it changes the division of labor in the production of a comic book.' I was talking about a writer using this program — that gives him a little more work to do, but it also gives the penciller less work to do. So who gets paid what and who determines that?

ALAN: *Or the penciller could work from the written script, using your software to modem the information to the inker.*

JON: You bet. In fact, I've talked to inkers who wanted to be pencillers, and the only reason they're not is that they're kind of slow. This may help some inkers do pencilling or expand their creative capabilities or whatever. You might even see a whole group of specialists who translate plots or scripts into computer-generated breakdowns and phone the work to artists.

ALAN: *What other functions do you offer?*

JON: Well, I have one called recursive pattern development. Here you have a 2-D circle or square with diagonals This can be your design matrix and you can design some complex pattern around this. For instance, if you want some fantastic marble floor with a repetitive pattern, you just get a perspective print-out. You don't have to worry about drawing circles in perspective, which is a pain. It's done — it's right there. You just draw right over it and save yourself a hell of a lot of time.



ALAN: *This is . . . the phrase "quite clever" comes to mind, but I think that understates it.*

JON: Well, it kind of evolved. I originally got the idea right about the time I decided to get into comics. I had picked up a copy of POPULAR COMPUTING and they had this whole thing on computer graphics and — *bingo!* — the idea was just there. In fact, it seemed so obvious to me that I'm a bit amazed nobody else has done it. Anyhow, at that time the available software was nothing. It's only been in the last year or so that you could get any kind of decent graphics software — so as I went along, I discovered that no one was really doing any affordable CAD software. Most of it cost $500 to $1000, and you needed 256K with an IBM PC XT or something. So once I defined my matrix, the product pretty much defined itself.

ALAN: *How affordable is your system?*

JON: I've recently reconfigured it. If you want the whole thing, it's $59.95. That includes the vinyl binder with file disks and a 3-D CAD tutorial, in case you want to learn graphics programming. I show you how to work with arrays and segmented display files and windowing functions and world co-ordinate systems . . . the whole trip. But if you don't want to buy all that, you can get just the program disk with on-disk instructions, a production chart printout routine — and three programs, of course — for $39.95.

ALAN: *That's incredibly inexpensive. I mean, I'm not an artist, I have trouble connecting dots — but I can see owning this, just for fun.*

JON: It is fun, and it makes pencilling a lot easier. For instance, there's another function that casts shadows — which is very helpful in creating the illusion of depth. And if you have a complex object, this can be a real chore. Here, let me show you. *(Reaches for bookshelf.)* This is stuff I got in the workshop from **Sal Amendola**. He's the talent co-ordinator at DC Comics. I was in his workshop last year. Here . . . here's what you've got to do to cast a shadow. With my program it takes about ten seconds or so.

ALAN: *What the reader is not seeing is a page of a solid construction with a solar viewpoint and all these many, many construction lines going down to create the shadow in its accurate position — there are five different notes that tell you how to do it. And yours is the proverbial push of a button.*

JON: That's it. And you can position your light anywhere. But, you know, my only question now is — are people going to want

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"The industry forgot what business it was in."

this? I suspect there are people who are going to get upset. You know, purists who see this as taking away from the artists' skill, or who find it threatening in some way.

ALAN: *I see it as a tool. As you pointed out before, you still have to be a good artist.*

JON: You have to know storytelling and good composition. Unless, of course, I get into that program I mentioned before where I use a sub-routine to check composition. *(Laughter.)* But quantifying the elements of composition would be a major task. You're getting into artificial intelligence, because the program would have to determine, you know, is that circle significant — just what does it represent? And I don't think I want to get into that.

ALAN: *Are you able to lay out a whole page, or just individual panels?*

JON: A whole page could be done if you had a $2500 plotter. Then you could even have the whole page done in non-photographic blue, and the publisher could crank these suckers out and then send them off to their artists. But then it would most likely be the publishers in control of the technology and not the artists and writers.

ALAN: *Does this have any capability of drawing shapes on the screen outside the constructs that you supply?*

JON: No. That's what the artist is for. This is just an aid in drawing.

ALAN: *Are there any other functions?*

JON: Oh, yeah. A lot of little ones. But actually I've been toying with this idea... Picture this: The Official Marvel Version of the COMIC ART CREATOR, with the Baxter Building and all the Marvel characters in proper proportion and everything. I think it would be a big seller.

ALAN: *Have you approached Marvel?*

JON: I'm toying with the idea.

ALAN: *So tell me, did you have any previous computer experience before doing this?*

JON: No.

ALAN: *You went into this cold? I've done programming, mostly using data filing systems, but I've stayed away from graphics because of all of the problems there. What was the hardest part of the program?*

JON: I guess I'd have to say, as a matter of fact, developing my own filing systems.

ALAN: *How did you do it?*

JON: I simply used text files and converted numerical data to string data and back again. That was the easy part, though. The hard part was coding incoming sets of data and then branching them to the proper plotting matrix and so on... but I suspect that anyone reading this is getting bored.

ALAN: *I see a pile of artwork over here. How much of it is computer-generated?*

JON: Well, actually, none of it.

ALAN: *Why's that?*

JON: So far, I've been concentrating on the technical end, so all I have are production runs that aren't worth showing. You know, you can't really tell by looking at a piece whether it was done with a computer or by a good draftsman, so the work itself can't represent the program. It's only significant in terms of the amount of time it saves.

ALAN: *Are you doing anything besides the program? What exactly is Newfane Graphics?*

JON: Although Newfane Graphics has involved a number of employees and business partners over the past 10 years, Newfane Graphics is basically me. Engaged in such activities as T-shirt and poster silk screening, carousel restoration and 1/12 scale miniature manufacture, I finally decided to fulfill a lifelong ambition in comic art. This began about two years ago with a part time job at Moondance Comics where I worked under **Steve Perry** (TIME SPIRITS). After being accepted to the Kubert school but being unable to attend, I met **Sal Amendola** in Boston last year, and after a lot of pestering, was accepted into DC's Artists Workshop. I attended that for six weeks last year and received my first assignment not long ago. It's an eight-page story by **Jerry Siegel** that I pencilled and it should be published in the NEW TALENT SHOWCASE sometime this spring or summer.

As far as the COMIC ART CREATOR goes, I got the motivation for that during the workshop, as a means of correcting various persistent deficiencies in my work. I'm in the middle of marketing it now with ads in DC Comics. Although I'm primarily an artist, I have also done a fair amount of writing, having studied under **John Irving** at Windham College in Putney, VT.

I am currently working on a triple crossover concept involving a computer text-adventure-assisted board game, a line of surrealistic "action figures" and, of course, a comic book. I'll be making the rounds with this concept soon. There seems to be a lot of possibilities... it's really an exciting business. I think things are just starting to happen.

ALAN: *You mean the so-called "renaissance"?*

JON: More than that, it's just the evolutionary stage of the market. In a lot of ways, it's just starting to catch up with more sophisticated marketing.

ALAN: *What do you mean?*

JON: Well, if you had asked me a few years ago, I would have said that the comic industry was doomed — mostly because it seemed to have forgotten what business it was in. The railroads made this mistake in the 1940s. The industry thought it was in

Detail from an unpublished story by Jon King.

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JON KING

"Marvel will market animated comics."

the train business, but it wasn't — it was in the transportation business.

ALAN: *You mean that people stopped using trains, and started flying, or whatever?*

JON: It went way beyond that. At one time, for instance, Los Angeles was surrounded by branch lines and trolleys, and you didn't have to buy a car or gas or oil. But Standard Oil of California bought up all those lines and turned them over to the highway commission or whatever and — guess what? The railroads lost market share, and the oil and automotive companies gained.

ALAN: *But how does that relate to comics?*

JON: The...uh...adolescent entertainment dollar, I guess you'd call it, is being attacked by a whole series of new entertainment forms.

ALAN: *You mean video games?*

JON: Yeah, and home videocassettes. As a matter of fact, I'll make a prediction: I think within three years, and possibly sooner, Marvel will market animated comic books for the video market.

ALAN: *I think you're right. Computer graphics will advance to the point where they'll zip out new "books" every month competitive with the price of a graphic novel.*

JON: Or use a cassette to kick off a new book. And if you look at things, you see Marvel in excellent market position with DC having to play catch-up if it wants to compete, which is ironic, since DC puts out a better book.

ALAN: *I'm looking at your vital statistics — do any of these things have anything in common? I mean, why did you decide to make toys, for instance?*

JON: That was an idea for a product I saw that wasn't being made, a one-twelfth scale reproduction carousel. It was a natural crossover, I did well with that.

ALAN: *Why did you stop?*

JON: I was working a lot with plastics — thermo-setting resins — and it was starting to get to me. You know, the fumes and skin irritation. So I wanted something without a lot of paraphernalia. Comics are perfect.

ALAN: *Is that what you like about comics?*

JON: I guess what I really like to do is design products, and that's one of the exciting parts of being in comics right now. A lot of rethinking is going on concerning just what *is* a comic, who reads it, and what you can do with it.

ALAN: *True. But as a retailer I must say that the X-MEN and TEEN TITANS make up more of my paycheck than the progressive stuff. So, financially, there seems to be a formula to follow.*

JON: I think you can take a basic formula and add to it. I remember some of the guys in the workshop putting down Marvel because of the constraints...you know, the mandatory fight scenes and things. But as a writer, I could see that as a challenge — how do you get a really fun idea going within those constraints? I think **John Byrne** has done well there.

ALAN: *The hard part is to get a product that doesn't insult the non-comic reader's intelligence.*

JON: It's just a matter of expanding the market, like any other industry. If that happens, the market could explode. Especially with all the improving technologies, improved printing processes and so forth. That means a better product. So you can go after a more mainstream-accepted art form. There are a lot of possibilities. I find it very exciting.

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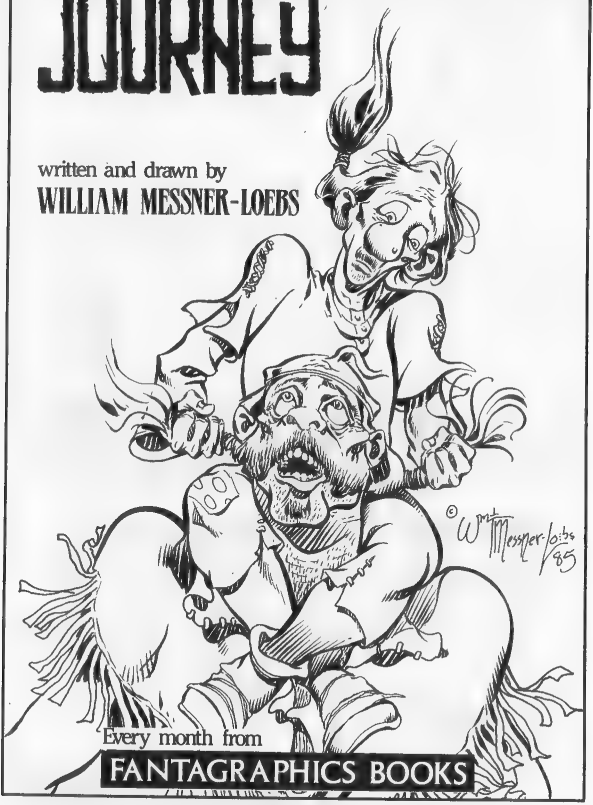

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"I was born a romantic. Before I discovered the Renaissance I discovered comics."

To be quite frank, Matthew Jorgensen is my best friend. We've grown up together, attended the same high school, created our own comics characters together, we moved to New York in the same year, and we've argued endlessly about comics (and every other passion we shared) throughout our friendship. In fact, Matthew and I became friends directly because of our shared interest in comics.

As a friend, he's the best; a good man to have at your back during all hairy situations. He's also one of the most talented illustrators I've ever seen. And, although Matthew and I rarely agree on anything, I've found him to be a perceptive and thoughtful critic of the medium. Honesty compels me to blushingly admit that I am Matthew's unnamed collaborator on the comics project he discusses. However, the goal here is not self-promotion. Because Matthew is a serious, working professional artist, it was impossible to get his opinions about what's right (and wrong) with comics without him citing some examples from his own work to back up his arguments.

Personally, I think it takes a lot of courage to put your money where your mouth is by expressing your opinions in print. Many will disagree with Matthew's views, but all doubting Thomases are herewith invited to check out the samples of Matthew's work accompanying this interview and decide for yourselves whether or not he knows what he's talking about...

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Matthew Jorgensen
Born: 12 November 1957 — in Omaha, Nebraska
Residence: Jersey City, NJ
Training: Self taught
Favorite Tools: My hands
Favorite Film: APOCALYPSE NOW
Favorite President(s): Andrew Johnson and Richard Nixon because they both almost got impeached.
Pet Peeve: The irresponsible news media
Professional Credits: A comics story in LEGENDARIA, a gaming magazine; Iron Crown Enterprises fantasy game box covers, METAL HURLANT cover; August '85; posters and sets for the rock band ELIXER; illustrations for the film THE BLASPHEMING MOON (in progress); and a short time spent doing advertising artwork *(blechhhh!)*

MATT JORGENSEN

"Most of the teachers at art schools

STEVE RINGGENBERG: *Matt, how long have you been interested in comics?*

MATT JORGENSEN: Pretty much as long as I can remember.

STEVE: *What attracted you to comics in the first place?*

MATT: That's hard to say. If you want to get silly about it you could say that I was born a romantic and before I discovered the Renaissance I discovered comics, and saw these guys strutting around saying words and acting heroic, and saving the underdog. Superman was always saving Lois Lane and being noble about it and basically treating people well.

STEVE: *What are some of the comics that you read as a child?*

MATT: I read DC up until I was six or seven years old, and then I discovered Marvel and SPIDER-MAN, THOR, and THE FANTASTIC FOUR a little bit — but I thought they were a little silly. This is '65 through '69. THE FANTASTIC FOUR always struck me as real pretentious, though I liked **Jack Kirby's** work. But Spider-Man and Daredevil I liked because they were smart-ass wise-acres and had girlfriend trouble and this kind of stuff, which was a lot nicer than what DC was doing at the time which was just plain silliness and kind of insulting.

STEVE: *What attracted you, was it the characters or the art?*

MATT: The art, because there was something about **Ditko's** work that really struck me. I just looked at it and thought, hey, this is really neat. And it just seemed to have more life or more spunk or guts or heart or whatever it is that makes you like something. Spider-Man had it and Superman didn't.

STEVE: *As time went on, did your tastes change?*

MATT: Well, I still liked **Ditko**. I still liked the **Ditko** SPIDER-MAN. I still liked the **Kirby** Silver Surfer stories — you know, the FANTASTIC FOUR **Galactus** stories. But, yes they did. I got more demanding as I saw people progressing, you know: **Steranko, Adams, Kaluta, Wrightson, Jones,** all those guys. They started doing things that were more experimental. The drawing was better, and the writing was getting a little better, though I don't think the writing has progressed any where near as much as the drawing.

STEVE: *Do you think that reading comics had a positive effect on your intellectual development?*

MATT: Oh, decidedly.

STEVE: *How so?*

MATT: Well, my parents tell me that I knew how to read before I got into school, because of comic books. Because I was reading SUPERMAN, they would read it to me, and I would ask them what this word meant, and this kind of stuff, and I was able to read by the time I got into school, which helped my progression in school a lot. English was always easy, reading was always easy.

STEVE: *Were you first turned on to comics by your older brothers?*

MATT: No, I was turned on to comics by my father. My older brothers were never really into comics very much, nowhere near as much as me. But my dad was very into science fiction. He was into **Buster Crabbe.** He told me what Tarzan really was because **Weismuller** was popular but kind of a flabby sap there towards the end.

STEVE: *But, it was your dad's interest in comics that sort of got you sparked into it?*

MATT: Yeah. My parents always bought me comics. I would get sick, and . . . when you're a sick kid Mom and Dad are always so much nicer, and they always ask: what do you want? I always said, without fail: I'd like a comic book. Every once in a while Mom would mess up and bring home an **ARCHIE** but she learned pretty quick. In fact, that's how I discovered Marvel comics. Because I was sick and Mom brought me home a DAREDEVIL comic; Daredevil and the Owl, drawn by **Gene Colan.** And that's what got me into Marvel.

STEVE: *Did you keep reading comics through high school?*

MATT: Through junior high school, but after junior high I kind of got the attitude, well I'm getting older now, and I had stopped drawing. As a little kid, I used to draw all the time. Dad used to bring home pads and he would do a figure and I would put the costumes on the figure, and that kind of stuff, which was really neat. The more I think about it, the neater I think it is. But, by the time I got into high school, it was time to start having more serious goals.

STEVE: *What kind of things did you turn to when you decided you were too old for comics?*

MATT: Oh, god, I was going to be a lawyer there for a little while. I guess that was most of it. I pretty much had decided that I was going to go into law and so I started reading state law books. And the further I got along and the closer I got to college, the more I didn't want to do that. It just didn't seem right. And by the time I had got out of high school and had signed up for college that summer, talking with a few friends got me to realize that law definitely isn't for me. I had just barely started to get back into drawing again. So, I started late, as far as that goes I was 17 or 18 when I really started drawing seriously, and I know guys that were getting professional work when they were 19 because they went to the High School of Art and Design here in Manhattan . . . who always knew what they wanted to do and always did it. They realized when they were ten years old, just like I did, that that's what I wanted to do, I wanted to draw. But, I got through a stage where I was too old for comics, comics were for kids . . . it was silly to go into, it wasn't what a serious adult did. And the closer I got to it, the more I realized that as a serious adult the last thing I wanted to do was become a normal businessman type . . the Wall Street crowd, the black suit and the red ties. Go down to Wall Street and look at those guys. They're all wearing black suits and red ties; it's sickening. I knew that I didn't want to do that, but at the same time, my brother who was in college was going into the fine arts, which exposed me to different people. I was realizing who **Steranko** was, who **Adams** was, who **Smith** was, and at the same time, my brother Michael would come home with these books and say: Listen I just discovered this guy. This is **Francisco Goya.** Look at it, it's really good. And I'd look at **Goya** and go: Holy Shit! — this guy is amazing. Like most people, I always knew who **Da Vinci** and **Michelangelo** were, but they didn't strike me until later, when I started looking at these wonderful folds . . . and how the bodies moved, even if the anatomy wasn't perfect, as much as you think it was. So I was getting all of this different input. I was still interested in comics, and I was interested in fine art, but I wasn't interested in the bullshit of fine art, you know: the galleries, and everything. Plus, when I was in college I had this one professor in particular who was a lot more interested in either fucking the girls in class or fucking his friends' wives than he was into telling anybody anything about art, which seemed to be the case in most of the collegiate art schools. Most of the people — the School of Visual Arts aside, which has working professionals teaching you what's going on — most of the teachers at art schools are failed artists. Let's face it — they couldn't get gallery shows anywhere else except that they're teachers and they show in the college galleries, and they start doing corporate art. Most of the stuff that I saw really turned me off. There was no technique, and if there's one thing I like to see it's technique, at least. You can throw away technique so long as you show me that you have it, but so much of modern art, like modern dance, like the *avante garde*, the ongoing *avant garde* seems to be a reason not to have technique. Go watch a modern dance sometime. There's some really flabby, out of shape dancers out there, and they shouldn't be there. And it's the same thing in the gallery world — there's a lot of peo-

are failed artists. Let's face it."

ple out there who never even had technique to begin with, and they've decided that they want to try and be *avante garde*, without going through some of the technical development first. At least **Picasso** had some technique before he went to the loose cubism, or tight cubism. But, he started somewhere. He didn't just come right out and say: This is bullshit, I'm not going to do it because I can't draw. I'm going to do something that's absolutely no technique — which is what a lot of people do: they don't go through the learning of a technique first before they reject it.

STEVE: *As an artist, which comic artists have influenced you throughout your development?*

MATT: When I was a kid, I guess like a lot of other people out there, one of the guys that influenced me a lot was **Neal Adams**. Because he was so natural. It seemed . . . he wasn't drawing cartoons or comics, he was drawing people. He was still a comic book artist, but he was looking at life. . . I mean **Adams'** people moved like people. True, he exaggerated; who doesn't. The medium lends itself to exaggeration, and for dramatic effect it works very well. **Adams** just had a way with the figure. The anatomy was correct, for one thing. And all of his people didn't look alike. So many comic-book artists, even today, all their characters are interchangeable, they just have different colored hair. All the faces look alike.

STEVE: *Like a black character could be a white character with different coloring?*

MATT: Right, or an Oriental is a Caucasian with slanted eyes. **Adams** was the first one that I noticed who started drawing the people as people. His expressions weren't just the opening and the closing of a mouth, and it wasn't just the fierce lines, the eyebrow pointing down towards your nose. It was all your facial muscles working to create a certain expression, and it wasn't all the same expression from time to time.

STEVE: *Who else did you like?*

MATT: Oh, **Steranko** a lot because his narrative was just so good, not his writing *per se*, but his storytelling, the way he laid out the page. His anatomy was totally wrong, it still is, but he can tell a hell of a story, even though he's not all that great as a draftsman. He had a nice flair. He had a way with the figure, even though it wasn't correct. **Kaluta's** scratchiness attracted me. It didn't look like comics, it looked like book illustration. It had these scratchy lines. I always kind of wanted my line to look scratchy, though it doesn't. My hand just doesn't do it. **Kaluta** had good figures even though his anatomy wasn't right all the time. His anatomy wasn't as accurate as **Adams'**, but there was still a realism there that im-

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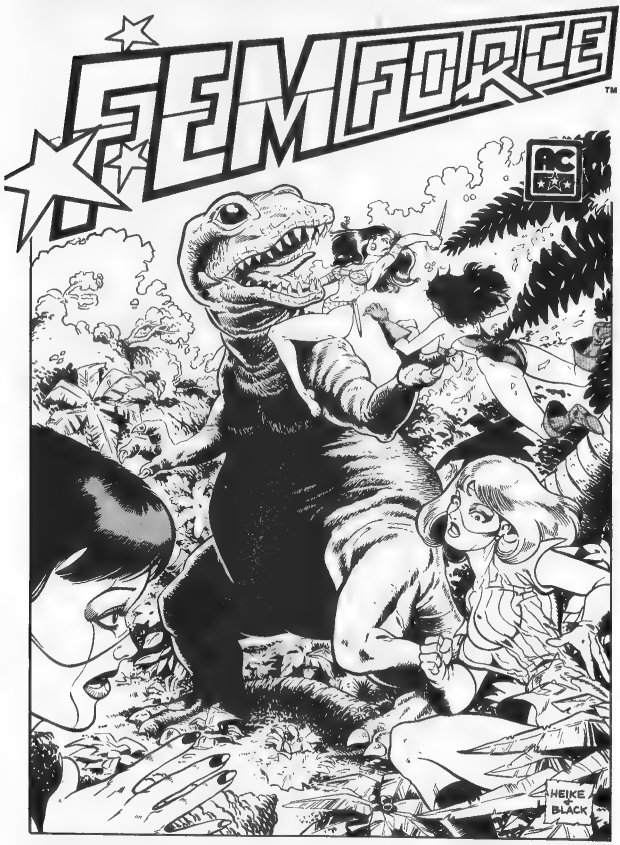

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pressed me. **Wrightson**, of course, because of his monsters. SWAMP THING. You could see **Frazetta** all over it; but it was okay with him because there was still **Wrightson** in it. He wasn't just an imitator, he obviously learned how to draw by looking at **Frazetta**, but he still went beyond that, which a lot of people don't. **Smith**, really more than anybody else, helped me make my decision to start drawing again, when I was shown **Smith's** Tupenny Conan. Now let's backtrack a little bit . . . I had seen **Barry Smith's** work when he first came over, when he did the AVENGERS, when it looked a lot like **Kirby's**. It was okay, but it looked like **Kirby's** work. If I'm going to look at **Jack Kirby**, I want **Jack Kirby**, and that was also at the stage when I stopped looking at comics. And then right around '74 or '75 somebody showed me the first Tupenny Conan and it blew me away. The anatomy was bad but the drawing was really nice. There was a lot of heart in the work, and I said, well if this guy could have started out being a **Jack Kirby** clone, and then he wound up drawing this kind of stuff, maybe there is something more adult than comics. Looking at that work really gave me an impetus to get back into it and start drawing.

STEVE: *Did looking at classically-inspired artists like Kaluta and Smith make you look up their inspirations in turn?*

MATT: Yeah, because I never knew who **Mucha** was until I had read an interview with **Barry Smith** and he mentioned **Alphonse Mucha** — so I looked him up, and here was this guy who was pretty much the father of, if not the father, he was at least the major look of Art Nouveau. Everybody pretty much looked like **Mucha**, the way a lot of people now look like **Adams** and the way people in the early '70s looked like **Frazetta**. Everybody was doing **Mucha's** style, and it was beautiful work. So, I just started getting more and more and more into the classics. **Millius**, he was a pre-**Raphaelite**, along with **Rosetti**, **Waterhouse**, guys like that. I mean they would go to the Promised Land, Jerusalem, and they would do sketches and start doing paintings, and these were guys who would spend five years on a painting, and it would come out looking beautiful. **Millius** did a painting of Ophelia floating down a river, I could show it to you *(gesturing towards his studio)* and to get the correct skin tone of the women, because he wanted the cold tone, he put her in a bathtub full of ice. You've got to remember he spent over a year on this painting, and she eventually got very sick and sued him. But it's still a beautiful painting. Guys like that are highly inspirational. I don't want my work to look like theirs, but I would like to be as good, as dedicated, to work that hard to get the right color. A lot of comics really piss me off because they're thoughtless.

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Jorgensen's art and design for ROLEMASTER game module.

STEVE: *What do you mean thoughtless? Explain yourself.*

MATT: It's formularized. Everything is formulated. The drawing is formularized, the writing is formularized. It's like two plus two equals four, every month. Everything's the same. Spider-Man has a problem with his girlfriend this month, they make up next month, and he has another problem with her the month after that. It just gets very silly. I would rather have things that take a lot more thought, a lot more research. If you're going to do a story set in the desert, then study how the desert is, how the ecosystem in the desert reacts, how the people live there. Everybody has the idea because it's comics or because it's science fiction that it's automatically Grade B, and there's no reason for that. I mean **Stanley Kubrick** did do 2001, **Frank Herbert** did write DUNE; you know, there's simply too much good work around for it to be treated in such a manner. But, that's also the nature of business. They want to get it out as fast as they can and a lot of the good people tend to be deadline missers, and the art is the same way. You look at a lot of people, you look at **John Byrne**, who's a very hard worker. The guy does a lot of work, and I don't do that much work, so I'm not trying to insult him, but you look at his work and you can tell where he draws the triangle, where he draws the square for the face, where he puts

"How many people walk around a sub-

the dot for the eyes, where he draws a circle for the shoulder, and it shows all over it, and it just doesn't work. It's obvious that he's doing it to meet the deadline and it's very fast and it's a nice style, but everybody's stylized. The major portion of people out there don't draw naturalistically. Everything's a formula. I just didn't see that as a viable way of working. I like my bodies like bodies and so I'm not going to use a circle where it's not exactly a circle.

STEVE: *How do you think comic art could be made better?*

MATT: Well, you're dealing with a business, so when you're dealing with a business, you're dealing with deadlines, you're dealing with contracts, so you've got your assembly-line way of approaching the work, and that keeps a lot of people from doing their best work. So, what I would like to see is just a little more thought on the side of the editorial staffs. When **Michael Golden** was first doing things for DC that I saw, he was doing BATMAN and MR. MIRACLE and they really weren't very good, yet somewhere along the line somebody discovered that he could do funny animals and he was a great cartoonist. Now he's doing "Bucky O'Hare" and it's one of the best things I've ever seen, it's good comics. Why have somebody who's obviously this good on a strip like "Bucky O'Hare" doing a mediocre BATMAN when the fans didn't go for it and he obviously wasn't that inspired? And that happens so much in comics. You go in with great fantasy samples and they give you the "Green Lantern Corps," and you wind up not getting into it and you don't do your best work. I think it's good business to find somebody who's very good at something and you exploit that. You don't find somebody who's a great cartoonist and have him start trying to draw like **Neal Adams**, because it doesn't work. You exploit what he's best at and that's simply wise business, yet so often in comics it's the other way around.

STEVE: *How do you think the writing in comics could be made better?*

MATT: I like to look at comics the same way I look at a short story. You've got two kinds of writing in a short story or a novel if it's not *avante garde*, if it's a straight narrative: you've got the prose used to tell you what a character looks like and what his surroundings are and what year it is, and then you've got the dialog, the people reacting to each other, reacting to their surroundings, to their situation. Now, in comics, for some reason somebody somewhere along the line decided that the pictures and the captions weren't enough, you also had to have expository dialog and expository dialog doesn't work. I have never seen it work because nobody's speaking the way real people address each other. They're reciting their lines to tell this poor schmuck out there who's reading it, who's got the story already anyway, what's going on. Instead of having expository dialog, you use the pictures and the captions, in place of the prose of the short story, and then you use dialog for the same reason you use dialog in the short story, to show how people react to their surroundings, and to each other and to the occurrences that are going on. And since we're touching on the negative aspects of comics right now, a couple more things I would like to touch on are the proverbial sex and violence. I'll do violence first. I strongly dislike the way most action is depicted in comics because it's so totally unrealistic. A lot of people that I have personally met at conventions and a lot of science-fiction fans simply have no idea what it's like to be in a violent confrontation. Every comic book that comes down the line has a fist fight or somebody pulling weapons out and nobody gets hurt. Spider-Man punches the guy and knocks him thirty feet across the room and his head hits the wall and he's knocked out, and then he bundles him up in his web and leaves him for the police. That's simply not the way violence happens out on the street. I know what it's like to have weapons pulled on me. I know what it's like to be in a fist fight and it *hurts*. It's not fun, you're scared to death, and I don't think that a lot of these people have the right to depict action in such a manner when they have not gone through some of these nasty things. Not that I'm going to turn around and pat myself on the back and say that I've earned the right because things have happened to me — but I think I think about it more.

Bucky O'Hare
by Mike Golden
from ECHO OF FUTUREPAST

© 1984 Larry Hama & Michael Golden

STEVE: *But what about the obvious rebuttal that comics are fantasy? This is not supposed to be realistic when the Thing and Dr. Doom square off and trash three quarters of Manhattan Island.*

MATT: Well, I think that that's an excuse for not knowing what you're doing. True, it's fantasy, but all of the best artwork in science fiction and fantasy has its air of realism; and especially because you're showing people getting into violent situations and nobody's getting hurt. I remember seeing an A-TEAM episode on television where the helicopter was going full bore and it crashed head-first into the side of a cliff and then fell thirty feet down the cliff. This was the bad guys, mind you, and they climbed out and nobody had a scratch. Those guys would have all been killed. So, you're saying that the kid's going to know that that's fantasy and it's not true — no, the kid isn't going to know that.

STEVE: *You don't think children can discern that?*

MATT: No, they can't. I read an article in NEWSWEEK on serial murderers where the Son of Sam was really surprised that people didn't die the way they did in the movies. They didn't just fall over nicely — their bowels let loose, their bladder let loose, they cringed, they gurgled. It's an ugly thing. I just don't think it's valid to show that. That's the kind of violence that I think people should be pissed off about being depicted, when they show the hero getting shot in the shoulder and all he's got is a sling to show for it. That's nonsence. The shoulder is one of the worst places in the human body you can be shot. Number one, if you're shot with a .38 in the shoulder, it's probably going to burst all of those major veins going through your shoulder and you're going to bleed to death. If you're lucky enough that it doesn't burst any of those veins, it's probably going to shatter the bone, the ball and socket joint, and you're not going to have full use of that arm. If it doesn't shatter the ball and socket joint, it's probably going to destroy a few tendons and you are going to be crippled in that arm for a while. If you're lucky enough to avoid all that, chances are

marine with absolutely no clothes on?"

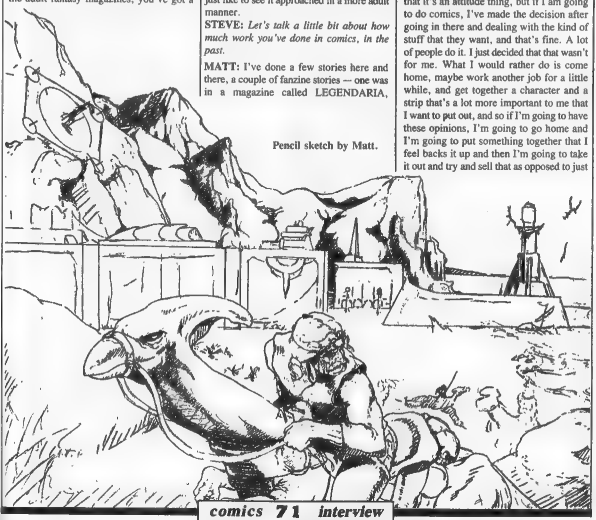
you're going to get arthritis where that wound is, and you just don't see that. There's very few places in television and comics that you see that. True, people are disturbed by it, but I don't like this gratuitous nonsense violence. I'd rather watch HILL STREET BLUES for, as much as it can be a downer, at least when they show violence, it's not a pretty thing. It's not a graceful thing. People get hurt. It hurts to get into a street fight. It hurts to have a chain bashed upside your head, it hurts to get stabbed. I totally disagree with showing violence in such a positive manner where nobody gets hurt. It doesn't happen and I don't like it.

STEVE: *How do you feel about the way sex and sexuality is depicted in mainstream comics?*

MATT: Well, there's usually not very much. You've got your relationships, but they're mostly soap-opera relationships and a lot of the women — Red Sonja, in particular — are just men with tits. It's basically not touched on at all. In the adult magazines, the adult fantasy magazines, you've got a lot of gratuitous T and A. In HEAVY METAL you've got men that are always in their spacesuits, yet on the same ship these women are running around with nothing on, and I don't like that. I think that's nonsense. If you do want to show some nice bodies, and I like nudes as much as the next person, then do it in a fashion that makes more sense... If they're going to take their clothes off to have sex that's fine. If you want to have a nice erotic, illustrated scene, I think that's great, and it's a healthy way of showing a male-female relationship, or if they're taking a shower, or they're going skinny dipping, but how many people walk around a submarine with absolutely no clothes on? Or walk around an aircraft carrier? So are they going to be walking around a spaceship with no clothes on? They might, but it's doubtful. I mean extrapolating upon what we know, let's get right down to it. The only reason they're doing it is for the same reason that PENTHOUSE has naked women, because it's going to sell something. I don't mind having nudity to sell it, but I would just like to see it approached in a more adult manner.

STEVE: *Let's talk a little bit about how much work you've done in comics, in the past.*

MATT: I've done a few stories here and there, a couple of fanzine stories — one was in a magazine called LEGENDARIA, another one was in DARKSTORM, which I didn't know about until after it was printed. I was a little ticked off about that. I have done some work for DC, none of which has seen print to date. I sold them a BATMAN cover a couple of years ago. It was my first professional sale in New York and it was never printed, and I'm a little upset about that because I thought it was a neat cover. It was Batman, crouching in this alley, holding up a copy of THE DAILY NEWS that said: *Batman Slain!* And behind him in this overcoat and slouch hat was the Joker and he had a .45 in one hand and a cream pie in the other. The basic joke of the cover was that you had to figure out which one was going to kill him, which was the deadly weapon. I did a couple of stories for them, but honestly, I didn't do the greatest job that I could have done, and it was my own fault. They were understanding, and they still liked it better than a lot of the stuff that they had. I was not pleased with them because they were super-hero stories and I'm really just not that into super-heroes. I don't think that it's an attitude thing, but if I am going to do comics, I've made the decision after going in there and dealing with the kind of stuff that they want, and that's fine. A lot of people do it. I just decided that that wasn't for me. What I would rather do is come home, maybe work another job for a little while, and get together a character and a strip that's a lot more important to me that I want to put out, and so if I'm going to have these opinions, I'm going to go home and I'm going to put something together that I feel backs it up and then I'm going to take it out and try and sell that as opposed to just



Pencil sketch by Matt.

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"I know guys that want to do SUPERMAN and that's great. I really don't."

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going in and getting whatever work they want to throw me. And I've gotten advice from a few different people on this. . . people that are pros in the business that have been around a lot longer than me, and they seem to think that's a valid stance to take, so I don't think that it's insulting to the other people in comics that do the super-heroes because they *want* to do super-heroes. I know guys that want to do SUPERMAN and that's great. They should do SUPERMAN because they'll probably do the greatest job. I just really don't want to do that, so I don't. I want to bring the philosophies that I've touched on a little bit here to the way I draw, the way I draw the figure, and the other things and I want to bring those to comics.

STEVE: *What kind of projects do you want to work on?*

MATT: Well, I've concentrated a lot on painting, in fact the bulk of my stuff that has been printed was all cover paintings, a few game box covers, a couple of magazine covers. I just sold one recently to METAL HURLANT, a nice demon up on a crystal rock streaming people through his fingers. I really got off on it, it was a fun piece to do.

STEVE: *When's that going to appear?*

MATT: They tell me it's going to appear in August of '85. And I really hope it does. The reason I say they tell me is because I sold that very same painting to a magazine out in California that was new. It was going to be competition for EPIC and HEAVY METAL. They were calling themselves FANTASIES ILLUSTRATED, but they decided that it sounded too much like the one out of Florida that didn't make it, but then it all became academic because one of the guys got busted for cocaine and their money started going into that, so I really don't think that magazine's ever going to hit the stands. So, I was able to sell that painting again, which was nice and I do hope that it sees print. So, I have concentrated a bit on painting and taking the paintings around, and I've been able to sell those. As far as comics I would like to do the strip I'm working on, called OUTRIDER. I'm sort of taking the tack of: Let's sit down and concentrate on one project. And put that together and take it around to people and see what happens. If we don't sell it, that's the way it goes, we'll probably still work on it and keep taking it around until we do.

We chose OUTRIDER. Originally we were going to call it Tales of Calador, which is actually the title that I think we like a little better, but OUTRIDER's got a little more punch. It's a little bit more commercial. And because this strip is kind of a picaresque, fantasy science fiction western, we thought that OUTRIDER sort of fit all of those various things that our strip touches on. An outrider is basically a frontiersman of this outback planet. He's a frontiersman when he's out guiding a merchant caravan, and he's a policeman when he's in the main city. He's a strategist when it comes to dealing with any kind of urban warfare that might happen.

Art for OUTRIDER.

STEVE: *An outrider is basically a jack-of-all-trades.*

MATT: Yeah, a jack of all kinds of mercenary trades, though. He's probably not a good blacksmith. He's more of a weapons strategist, tracker, those kind of things. It's going to have some basic fantasy elements, I mean it's aimed for a commercial market. So it is going to have the young hero who was raised by the Elves, goes to the humans, and in a sort of Moses, changeling kind of thing, becomes the avatar, the leader of this planet. But he has his problems along the way. He is a mystic, and in his mystic rites he does take drugs. That could be a very interesting problem. It's also about the friends he has, some of the people he's going to get along with, some he isn't. There's going to be lots and lots of women. We hope that the women characters will be convincing. In order to create these characters, we are interviewing a lot of female friends just to get their input, their ideas, to find out what we're doing wrong, because obviously I don't think like a woman and neither do you. So, the best way to find out what's wrong with female characters is to go to a women and say, what is it about the female characters that bugs you? Are they all men with tits, or are they all 2-D? What is it? And how would a woman react? I want to know, because I want it to be right.

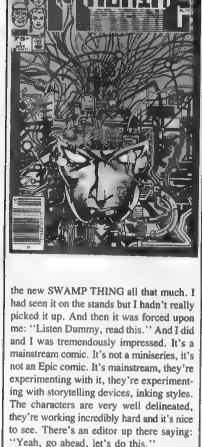
STEVE: *Well, despite the presence of more and more female writers in comics, do you see the depiction of women in comics as more stereotyped than the male characters are?*

MATT: Well, it pretty much abounds with stereotypes, no matter where you go, but yeah, because they're making it on doing what the editors and what the mainstream business demands. It is hard to do deep characters because a lot of people don't think it's commercial. I disagree and hope to be able to prove it.

STEVE: *One exception right now is SWAMP THING which is very well written, has good characters and a well-rounded, well-developed female character in the person of Abigail Cable.*

MATT: Yes, I agree. I was not aware of

"Starlin, Byrne, Kane, Kirby — they deserve



the new SWAMP THING all that much. I had seen it on the stands but I hadn't really picked it up. And then it was forced upon me: "Listen Dummy, read this." And I did and I was tremendously impressed. It's a mainstream comic. It's not a miniseries, it's not an Epic comic. It's mainstream, they're experimenting with it, they're experimenting with storytelling devices, inking styles. The characters are very well delineated, they're working incredibly hard and it's nice to see. There's an editor up there saying: "Yeah, go ahead, let's do this."

STEVE: *Karen Berger deserves a lot of credit for letting the creators take the ball and run with it.*

MATT: I agree and I think **Dick Giordano** deserves a lot of credit for letting **Karen Berger** do that. Let's face it, DC is big business. It's a corporation, it's Warner Communications, for God's sake. And that that's getting through and that DC's behind it saying: "Yeah, do it more, and keep up the good work." I think that's great, and I hope to see more of that kind of thing. I think that the industry is heading in that direction. It's going to take a while, but there are people out there that feel the way I do, I've talked to them. There's some tremendous people out there.

STEVE: *Right now the comics industry has greater diversity in its products than at any period since the 1940s.*

MATT: This is true, this is very true. You've got the smaller companies coming up — unfortunately, Pacific had . . . I'm not familiar with what their financial problems actually were, I think it's a shame that they had to fold because I thought they were putting out some very, very nice products. They brought **Dave Stevens** into the public eye. He was doing work in California for years and years. The guy's been a pro since he was — what? 16 or 17? — but nobody out there really knew who he was, and they put out THE ROCKETEER. It's good comics. It's got nice writing. Maybe people don't run around saying Geeze and Cripes and Jiminey, but he pulls it off. He's got that element of fun. He's not taking himself too seriously but he's obsessed with doing a good job. That work is amazing. The last one that Eclipse put out is one of the best packages I've ever seen as far as coloring, writing, inking, drawing, storytelling. **Stevens** is a lot more than just a guy that draws pretty pictures, he knows how to tell a story. A lot of people can learn from this guy, and it's nice to see work like that. Who else out there is real good? **Art Adams**, who's a relative newcomer. I like his work a lot. **Art Suydam**. I know a few people that complain about **Suydam** because he does look so much like **Frazetta** and **Wrightson** and he's obviously lifted his writing style from **Bode**. I guess maybe I'm doing a turnaround, saying that let's not be imitators, guys, let's all just be ourselves. But I think **Suydam** is doing that. It's obvious who his influences are, but he's pulling it off because it's so damn funny and it's so damn good. He's not imitating second rate. He's not a second rate **Neal Adams**, he's doing really good work. Every one of those pages is a full water color and they're beautiful. "Mudwog" from ECHO and the stuff that he did for EPIC, that's all tremendously funny stuff. He's doing stuff that **Frazetta** didn't do. He's twisting it around a little bit in a way that **Frazetta** didn't. He's bringing himself to you, to his work, and through his work, to you, and I've never met **Suydam**, but just from reading his strip he's probably a very funny guy. He's got a real good sense of humor. I heard that he works with Playtime watercolors. The 69¢ watercolor pallette and he gets those colors — amazing. And gets the textures that he goes for, and it's not muddy and I think that it's great and more power to him. And for that matter, more power to **Neal Adams** and his comics line. **Neal Adams** has criti-

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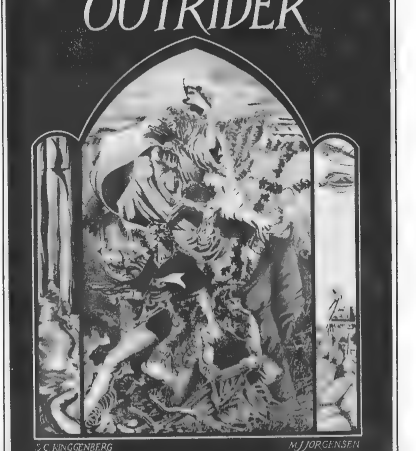
credit whether I like the story or not."

TM & © 1985 Roggenberg & Jorgensen

cized the industry for a long time but he's also turned around and put his money where his mouth is. I may not always agree with what he's done, but he's doing it and I hope to do the same thing and I think that I am in my own way. **Barry Smith** has sort of done the same thing recently. For all his knocking comics, for years and years and years, and superheroes in particular, all of a sudden this year, **Barry Smith** is back in comics and he's done the Thing and he did the MACHINE MAN mini-series. He did that X-MEN ANNUAL, and goddam if he didn't do a good job. That Thing story was funny. It wasn't pretentious, it wasn't super Mr. Artist doing it, I was really surprised to hear about **Smith** going back into comics. I was real curious to see what he was going to do, and I must say I was pleasantly surprised; he brought his attitudes and he did really good work. I thought the MACHINE MAN was some of the nicest super-hero work I'd seen in a long time. There's an example of comics not showing violence in a real positive manner. Maybe it was a little pretentious, I don't know. I liked it. I thought **DeFalco's** script was good. They didn't want to do it . . . people fighting against the way big business was handling things. I guess they were sort of underground capitalists as it were. They were fighting for something. But they didn't like, especially Machine Man, didn't like seeing people getting killed on either side, and I thought that was a nice touch and I think a twelve- or thirteen-year-old kid is going to look at that and be affected by it, if just a little bit, and I think that's wonderful.

STEVE: *What are some other kinds of stories you'd like to see adapted for comics, say from another medium?*

MATT: I don't know if I'd like to see adaptations so much as just more original science fiction and fantasy done in comics. I would like to see a good version of DUNE, but then, I am probably a DUNE fan as much as I don't consider myself a fan; I guess I'm a fan of DUNE. I would really like to see it done justice to, but mostly I would just like to see people really getting into creating their own worlds, and their own characters. I think **Elaine Lee** and **Michael Kaluta** are doing that on STARSTRUCK, which is neat. I don't know what the major fan vote is on STARSTRUCK yet. I'm interested to find out . . . I have a lot of other ideas and a lot of other goals to go to, stories that I want to do, experimental stories with no words, things that are maybe a little, oh I guess, artsy-fartsy. I hope it won't be pretentious, but I have other art interests. I'm very influenced by dance. I've been around dance for a long, long time. I've done dance posters for various companies, I've designed sets for rock bands and posters for rock bands and that kind of stuff, and people have probably seen it and not known that this is also somebody who's interested in doing comics. So, I haven't been lazy, I just haven't been real busy in comics because I have been interested in other things. But now I've narrowed my scope and said, I'm going to do this. I think that more people doing that is going to make comics a little better, a more fun medium to do, because you're going to care about it more, and you're just always going to do your best, like **Suydam's** work, again, **Stevens**, like **Art Adams**, the **Hernandez Brothers**. God, there are lots and lots of good people out there, and I guess it sounds like I've been dumping on the comics industry a little bit here and I haven't meant to, it's simply my love for the medium speaking. I don't mean to dump on anybody. Surely **Jim Starlin** and **John Byrne** and **Gil Kane** and **Jack Kirby** — my God, these guys are some of the hardest workers I've ever seen in my life, and they deserve credit whether I may like the story or not. They still deserve credit for being some of the damn hardest workers, I mean, and that's part of being an American, isn't it? Isn't that what we're sort of taught, I'm not trying to be Mr. Patriot here, but that's what my dad is. That's one of the reasons why I love my dad is 'cause he's such a hard worker, and I think that I am too, I'm just working at doing what I feel is a good job. I'm not working at doing three comic books a month, so I'm willing to make a little less money to put out a product that I feel is a good product, as opposed to just putting out a large volume of work.



Page left: Cover art for Barry Smith's MACHINE MAN mini-series. Above: Matt's art for OUTRIDER, "a fantasy science-fiction western" currently on offer.

Art and Stories **BRIAN BOLLAND · JOHN BYRNE · DAVE GIBBONS**
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PLAUDITS FOR PLUNKETT

Yo, Dave,

COMICS INTERVIEW #17 was an extremely well-rounded issue! **Flo Steinberg's** interview was informal and warm. **Willingham/Rankin** was really fun, but most appreciated was the **Sandy Plunkett** feature. Speed be damned, his work is intelligent and elegant and it was great seeing this little-known but extremely-talented guy spotlighted.

So howsabout **Golden, Fujitake** and Los **Brothers Hernandez**?

Ken Meyer Jr.
904 E. 2nd St., Apt. D
Salt Lake City, UT 84102

A POWER BLAST: THE SEQUEL

Dear Mr. David Anthony Kraft,

In response to **Bill Wray's** letter in issue #18 on my letter in Issue #14:

I wonder who **Bill Wray** thinks he's kidding. There has never been any love lost between us personally or professionally. In response to his statement about "the rest of the animation department," as being a single friend of **Rick Hoberg's** and the only person to help out on WHAT IF? #16:

I've enclosed a copy of an interview with **Dave Stevens** and **Bil Stout** as conducted by **Robert Strauss** from NMP's COMICS FEATURE COLLECTORS EDITION #3 — here's a quote from **Dave Stevens** on WHAT IF? #16:

"DS: There was a MASTER OF KUNG FU. One of those *what if* jobs where somebody needed help on it and I took the last eight pages. **Rick Hoberg** had the job and **Bill Wray** was inking it, and we were all working full time at Hanna-Barbera at the time. I was doing these pages at night at home. Anyway, up against the wall, I had five pages left in partial stages of completion. I didn't have anyone else to call because everyone else was either out of town or not good enough.

"WS: So his last choice, in desparation…

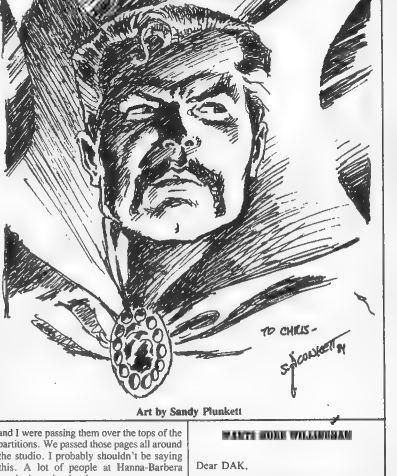
"DS: Bill had just gotten back from Seattle that night, it was around midnight. 'Bill! Please come over!' He came and we worked right there in my little one-room apartment in Van Nuys. We didn't finish but we got a chunk of it done. I took all the pages with me to work the next day. I was sneaking 'em between scenes of GODZILLA on my light board there in the animation studio **Hoberg** and I were passing them over the tops of the partitions. We passed those pages all around the studio. I probably shouldn't be saying this. A lot of people at Hanna-Barbera worked on that book.

"RBCC: I always wondered why some of these Marvel jobs look a little …

"DS: Rushed?"

Dave Stevens is obviously not as remiss about admitting these facts as **Bill Wray** seems to be. Lastly, I find it amusing that someone who I've had no contact with in over two-and-a-half years would *presume* to know what is in my portfolio.

Paul S. Power
POWER ART AND DESIGN
6404 Hollywood Blvd.
Suite 403
Hollywood, CA 90028



Art by **Sandy Plunkett**

WANTS MORE WILLINGHAM

Dear DAK,

Thanks for the great **Bill Willingham** interview in COMICS INTERVIEW #17. For those of us who have followed his career from the beginning. It was a big thrill! Okay, so that's swell, but where, *where* may I ask, was the mention of Bill's work at FGU,(Fantasy Games Unlimited, for the uninitiated). Where was the mention of the Destroyer's first appearance in DEATH DUEL WITH THE DESROYERS, a Villains and Vigilantes module?

Well?

Dainis Kaulenas
1325 Southeast Street
Amherst, MA 01002

APPROBATIONS FROM OLDE ENGLAND

Dear David,

First let me say how much I enjoy reading COMICS INTERVIEW. In the past, I've picked up the likes of THE COMICS JOURNAL specifically for the interviews and never read the material on either side. I much prefer to read what the creator(s) want to say than what the critics want to say about them.

David Weir
NORTHERN LIGHT GRAPHICS
10 Monkdale Avenue
Blyth, Northumberland
NE24 4EB ENGLAND

REAL PEOPLE INSTEAD OF PLASTIC

Dear David,

Thank you for sending us a copy of COMICS INTERVIEW with our ad in it. It seems as though some of the magazines do not deem it necessary to prove that the ad was ever printed let alone write. I really appreciated both from you. You've got our ad for as long as we publish CRIMSON DREAMS.

One thing that I've noticed about dealing with people in this business is that they are either friendly or extremely cold. Of all the places I've worked in the last 15 years, this is the only one where I've noticed this type of behavior. That is why your letters are so refreshing. They remind me that there are some real people instead of plastic corporations. Thanks.

Frank V. Albanese
7980 Crestview Lane
Denver, CO 80221

Thank you for noticing, Frank — you made my day!

—DAK

CORRECTION: CARDY DESERVES CREDIT

Dear DAK,

Another art correction for you folks: your recent interview with **Jerry Grandenetti** was illustrated with a SPECTRE cover supposedly illustrationg Jerry's wash-drawing technique. I think you made a mistake, since that cover was neither a wash drawing, nor was it done by **Jerrry Grandenetti**. That cover was the handiwork of **Nick Cardy**, DC's then back-up cover artist (as well as penciller/artist of AQUAMAN and the TEEN TITANS). **Cardy's** technique on covers occasionally evoked the interior artist's style, so many mis-creditings of his covers have been made (including a DETECTIVE cover reprint inside DC's recent MAN-BAT mis-credited to **Frank Robbins**). The SPECTRE cover, however, was signed!

I also wish that you'd managed to include an illustration from **Grandenetti's** Warren work with **Archie Goodwin** — not only because it's my favorite group of his efforts, but also it was the same of interviewer **Lou Mougin**... and **Grandenetti** himself. All that praise and no pay-off...

Richard Howell
Leonia, NJ 07605

PROGRAMMED AGAINST PORNO?

Dear David,

Bill Willingham is right. People are programmed only to see what they want to see. That letter that **Gary Kimber** wrote in #17 seemed to bear no relationship to its supposed subject, the **Kelly Nichols** interview in #13. To me, she sounded surprisingly knowledgeable about comics, fantasy, SF. I don't think her primary interest was in "titillating your readership." It sounded more like she was happy to talk about her outside interests, for once. Could **Kimber** have been confusing this with an interview she gave for HUSTLER or one of the other men's magazines.

Anyway, this is leading into a belated commendation for that and your magazine in general. The **Kelly Nichols** piece was inspired and it is only an example of the kind of intelligent, imaginative pieces you have in every issue, not just the big-name fan favorites, but new talents like **Bill Willin-**

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

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gham and **John Ostrander**, lesser-known names from the past like **Jerry Grandenetti** and **Arnold Drake**; people from the administration side of comics like **Carol Kalish** and **Flo Steinberg**. You have a superb mix and if some pieces are soft, like the **Jim Shooter**/SECRET WARS thing, they are offset by the likes of **Willingham** and **Ernie Colon**, who have enough opinions to fill up the pages of two issues of COMICS JOURNAL. (The soft approach has its plusses, too. You printed probably the only kind words said about VOID INDIGO in a non-Marvel magazine.) COMICS INTERVIEW is a joy to read every issue. You put out a really fun book.

Jerome Wilson
4524 Kinmount Road
Lanham, MD 20706

THE NAKED TRUTH

Dear Dave,

As is usual with COMICS INTERVIEW, #17 was a very interesting and revealing issue. I find myself particularly appreciating the interviews with people who may not be big names on the current North American scene, but who have made enormous contributions to the comics field. In this issue, we had **Gaylord Dubois** (retired) and **Joe Colquhoun** (British). Each interview showed us that there are plenty of alternative approaches to comics, which we do not see too much in North America today. (Incidentally, I read the CHARLEY'S WAR album from Titan some years ago and recommend it highly — despite the rather high cover price.) Also, the "behind the scenes" interviews are welcome — particularly the one with the legendary **Flo Steinberg** this issue.

Of the rest, the **Willingham/Rankin** interview stood out, with the look at the exciting ELEMENTALS mag. I would like to address one particular part of that interview. Towards the end (page 35), **Bill Willingham** says: "I just had a letter in the back of ELEMENTALS #1, where a person remarked that only the women got undressed. There was a clear scene where one of the guy took off his clothes, too. He couldn't see it! It was unable to be perceived. We're so programmed to notice everything that involves women in comics, in a derogatory sense, that that's what we perceive in comics and comment on. We're supposed to notice tits and if a woman's undressing. It's another attitude of intolerance."

The letter that Bill was referring to was mine. Now, in a letter of reply that I sent in (which I don't know if Bill had received at the time this interviw was done), I backed off a bit, saying that I had been perhaps hasty in perceiving a pattern in Bill's work in this respect. (Certainly, we all know of examples in which some artist or writer has obviously contrived to show women in as many "revealing" circumstances as possible. So I wasn't coming entirely out of left field if I — perhaps mistakenly — saw an indication of this in ELEMENTALS #1.) However, I would like to object to what Bill said in the interview in two respects:

1.) In the latter part of the above quote, I think Bill implicitly assumes a certain attitude ("unable to be perceived," "programmed," "intolerance") on my part, based on my particualr comments about ELEMENTALS #1. I think this is unfair. To jump from what may have been an oversight on my part (though see 2. below on this) to generalizations on my outlook is at best shakey. Perhaps I'm over-reacting on this, but by using my letter as an example of certain general attitudes, I think Bill is implicitly linking me to support of those attitudes.

2.) Bill says that "one of the guys took off his clothes, too." True enough, In his relpy to me in the ELEMENTALS #2 lettercol, he refers me to page 15 of #1. This does indeed show Tommy (Monolith) losing all his clothes. However, he is shown fully clothed as Tommy, and only partially and fully undressed as Monolith. This, I think, is not the same as showing an undressed or partially-clad male. On the other hand, I went back and reviewed #1 and found that Fathom was shown partially undressed in eleven panels and Morningstar in six. (The other male member, Vortex, was not shown undressed at all.) Seen in this light (Tommy never shown undressed, seventeen partially undressed female figures) I think that my remark that "only the women got undressed" appears to be pretty reasonable — if technically not totally true.

I don't want to make a big deal out of this. I made the comment in my original letter pretty much in passing (one sentence!). However, I thought I should defend myself, given that my "mistake" (if such it be judged) was, I think, minor and understandable. And, to give Bill his due, in ELEMENTALS #2 he *does* show Tommy totally disrobed in several panels and the females fully clothed at all times (even though the opening scene could logically have shown them still partially undressed as in #1). But, like I said, I don't want to make a big deal of this "who's got clothing on" deal, especially now that after three issues of ELEMENTALS, Bill would appear to be totally without "blame" in this respect. (No hard feelings, okay?)

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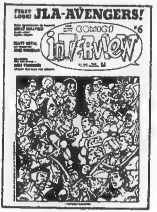

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OFFHANDED COMMENTS ABOUT RELIGION

Dear DAK,

I've thoroughly enjoyed issue #17 of COMICS INTERVIEW, particularly the interview with **Bill Willingham**, creator of the ELEMENTALS. So many comics these days have become imitative and repetitious, and it's easy to pass up a book that seems like more of the same. So, I made the mistake of missing ELEMENTALS #1, and reconsidered only in the face of positive reviews such as **R.A. Jones'in** AMAZING HEROES.

I must confess that I'm bothered by some of his offhanded comments about religion, particularly as they apply to Christianity. I've always assumed that being a Christian meant "loving the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy mind," and to "love thy neighbor as thyself." To "do as you would be done by," as illustrated by the admonition to feed the poor, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and seek justice for all. Personal success is desirable only if it's not at the expense of others. Thus the desire for personal power, especially power over others, is the antithesis of Christian charity and smacks of the sin of Pride and Avarice.

I cannot deny that these impulses have too often infected the church throughout history. All too often, the zeal for spreading the Word has taken precedence over the means by which it is achieved. Moreover, people are often unwilling to accept grace at face value and unwilling to admit responsibility for sin if it threatens their material well-being. So they try to "stack the deck" in their favor by ostracizing certain acts as "sinful," hoping to demonstrate how much more worthy they are as compared to others. Thus it is with Role-playing games and the *genre* of Fantasy in general. I have played role-playing games before, and none of them have involved any actual occult paraphernalia. I've found that, like many other hobbies, it attracts a wide variety of people including conservatives, liberals, libertarians, christians, agnostics, and others. They share an interest in the game and other factors are irrelevant, as they should be.

The politization of Christianity should not be allowed to occur unopposed. It is vital that we let out common bond of brotherhood remind us of our moral responsibility to each other. To give hatred and bigotry free reign serves the cause of Satan far better than any subversive group can.

Wayne O. Williams
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